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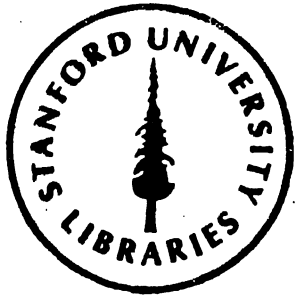
THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T

ROSE PASTOR STOKES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The Woman Who Wouldn't

By

Rose Pastor Stokes

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1916

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The Knickerbocker Press, New York

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MARY LACEY.....*A Flower Maker*
KATHERINE.....*Her Mother*
JOHN.....*Her Father*
KATIE.....*Her Little Sister*
BENNIE.....*Her Baby Brother*
JENNIE.....*Her Married Sister*
JOE.....*Engaged to Mary*
MCCARTHY.....*A Labour Leader*
THE DOCTOR
THE CHILD

ACT I

SCENE: *The interior of a workingman's home in a small milling town in Pennsylvania. The room contains to the left an old cupboard, a stove, a washstand with tin basin and half-broken water pitcher and pail; an empty soap box set near the stove. Down Left, a clothes-horse laden with expensive, elaborate undergarments freshly ironed, a kitchen chair and a table, an ironing-board, and a clothes-basket. To Right Centre, a small deal table; on it a profusion of gaily coloured flower-making material and a simple bit of pottery which holds an artificial American Beauty rose. There is a chair before the table, a stool on one side of it, and a cradle on the other. Down Right, a dilapidated old sofa. Up Right, in the angle of the wall, is an alcove inadequately curtained off by clean but scant and faded dimity curtains; and through these an old wooden bed and its trappings are half*

disclosed. One window up Left, near the cupboard, opens to a small back yard, where several lines of wash are seen fluttering in the wind. Up Right to left of alcove is another window looking on a street typical of the poorest district in any milling town. On the wall near this window hangs a small shelf upon which are ranged a variety of medicine bottles and a cheap old alarm clock. Street door up Centre. Between the door and shelf, rather low on the wall, an inexpensive but artistic (not Catholic) print of a Madonna and Child.

TIME: *The end of a day early in March.*

DISCOVERED: KATIE, *a thin, pale child of nervous movements, sits on stool near table Right, laboriously trying to fashion a red flower.* KATHERINE, *a hard-working woman of forty-three, stout and troubled with rheumatism, is ironing an elaborate undergarment. Her face is expressive of extreme humility.*

KATIE

Oh, I can't make one!

KATHERINE

[*Turning to glance at* KATIE]

Put that stuff down, child, put it down. If you spoil some o' that it'll only worry Mary, for they'll take it out o' her wages. She's worried enough these days! Though what worries her the good Lord knows.

[*Glancing at the child again who now sits with empty hands folded*]

That's a good girl. . . . Now where's Mary gone to?

KATIE

To Mrs. Jones to borrow a bucket of coal.

KATHERINE

[*Changing her irons*]

It was a cold, cold night. . . . But the Lord knows what's best for us.

[*She sighs, catches her breath with pain which comes upon her suddenly and frequently, and returns to her work*]

KATIE

[*Going to table Right*]

If I could make flowers Mary wouldn't have to work all day and all evening . . . would she,

Mother? . . . Mary won't sing and dance and play games with me as she used to do.

KATHERINE

Mary doesn't mind the work—she's always worked hard.

KATIE

Joe ain't been coming to see Mary all week.

KATHERINE

Give me a drink o' water, Katie. I'm jest dyin' with thirst.

[*To herself*]

How smart these young ones are nowadays!

KATIE

[*Going for water*]

I seen him takin' Bertha Mason home yesterday.

KATHERINE

Hush up, now!

KATIE

[*Giving her mother a cup of water and espying* MARY *through the window*]

Oh, Mary, Mary's coming!

[*She runs to the door*]

With a whole scuttle full!

[*She opens the door wide*]

[*Enter* MARY, *half dragging, half carrying a scuttle full of coal. She is a slip of a girl of nineteen. Her face is very pale. She wears her hair combed back simply. There are dark shadows around her eyes. She wears a shirtwaist and dark skirt and a little red shawl over her shoulders*]

MARY

[*Setting the scuttle down near the stove and slowly and painfully straightening her back*]

Oh——!

KATHERINE

It's awful kind o' Mrs. Jones.

MARY

[*Proceeding to fill the stove*]

Yes, Mother.

[*Pause*]

I said I'd return it as soon as I'd got my pay.

KATIE

Let *me* try to fill the stove, Mary.

[*She places a hand on the scuttle*]

MARY

No, dearie, Ye're too little.

KATIE

[*Moving away a bit and standing her tallest and straightest*]

But I'm growing!

MARY

Not fast enough, dear. Has Bennie cried?

KATIE

No, he's been sleeping.

MARY

[*Looking at the clock*]

It's near time fer his medicine.

KATHERINE

The doctor hasn't been yet.

MARY

[*With a burst*]

Will he never come?

KATHERINE

[*In astonishment*]

Why, child, Bennie ain't so sick as all that!

MARY

Ah——!

[*She utters a dry sob*]

KATHERINE

[*Alarmed*]

Ye're not sick, Mary!

MARY

[*Feverishly poking the ashes from the stove*]

No no! Mother . . . no! I—I—I'm all—right.

KATHERINE

[*With a sigh of relief*]

Ye'd better take a bit o' supper now. Ye haven't had a bite t' eat all day. There's some bread an' a little jam an' some tea.

MARY

[*Throwing the shawl on the chair Right*]

Thank ye, Mother; I'm not hungry yet.

[*There is a child's feeble cry*]

Poor little Bennie!

[*She goes to cradle and looks tenderly down at the child*]

Poor little brother.

[*She kneels and smooths his pillow*]

There!

[Rises, draws the cradle nearer the table, sits, rocks the cradle with her foot, looks quickly back at the mother at work and KATIE *warming herself before the fire; draws a letter from the folds of her waist, opens and fingers it for a few moments, then makes a strange noise like that of a hurt animal, inarticulate but poignant]*

KATHERINE

[Who has just changed her iron, testing its heat near her face, wheels around as quickly as her bulk will permit]

Who's the letter from?

MARY

[Thrusting it back in its place]

From Sallie Jamison.

KATHERINE

[Back at her work]

What's it all about?

MARY

Jes' some—some—sad news about a—a—a—a—friend o' Sallie's.

KATHERINE

What's the use o' *your* worryin' about it.

MARY

[*Taking up her work on the flowers*]

No use.

[KATIE *comes silently over to* MARY *and nestles up close in sympathy*]

KATHERINE

[*Ironing vigorously*]

Poor thing! . . . Everybody's got their troubles —but the greatest trouble of all is when we aint' got enough faith. . . . What'd I do without faith . . . with Father on strike fer two months an' you workin' s' extra hard, an' me only the mill-owner's wife t' wash fer, an' Bennie sick an' the doctor bills to pay —why, I'd worry me head off if I didn't b'lieve in the good Lord!

[*Folding a pressed garment, hanging it on the clothes-horse, and starting on a fresh one, she sings in a cracked, low voice*]

"In some way 'r other, th' Lord will provide.
It may not be *my* way, it may not be *thy* way,
An' yet in His *own* way—the Lord will provide.

Yes, we'll trust in th' Lord an' He will provide.
Yes, we'll—Oh——!"

[*She is checked by an attack of rheumatic pain*]

[MARY, *while* KATHERINE *is singing, gives* BENNIE *his medicine, returns the bottle to the shelf, peers through the window in feverish anxiety, and goes back to her work at the flowers*]

KATIE

[*On the stool, leaning over to* MARY]
What's the matter, Mary?

MARY

Nothin', dearie.

[*A pause*]

KATIE

I'm hungry, Mary. Can't *I* have some of your supper?

MARY

Ye've had yer share, Katie, an' Father ain't had none yet.

KATIE

Oh——!

[*She sighs*]

KATIE

Is that why you sent Nellie to Jennie's house?—Because there ain't 'nough supper fer everybody?

MARY

But she'll be back b'fore long. Besides, ye see her in school every day.

KATIE

Tomorrow's Nellie's birthday.

[*She timidly reaches for some material and attempts to make a flower, while looking up for* MARY'S *consent*]

MARY

Jes' this one, Katie. . . . Yes, Nellie'll be 'leven t'morrow.

KATIE

That's two years older'n me. *I'm* going to work when *I'm* 'leven.

MARY

Ye must go to school an' learn—you an' Nellie . . . an' not grow up ignorant like me . . . then tryin' awful hard to learn afterward. There ain't much use tryin' to learn after ye're

grown up an' workin' hard. . . . It's awful nice o' Mr. McCarthy tryin' to teach me ever since he come to win the strike fer the men, but I'm as hard as rock in my head with the readin' books. Ye must do better 'n me, Katie. Anyhow, ye couldn't get yer workin' papers till ye're fourteen.

KATIE

Yes, I could! I heard Mrs. Jones tell mother 't she got papers for Martha; an' Martha's only twelve.

[*Pause*]

'Cause all she had to do was *swear* that Martha's fourteen.

MARY

[*Working rapidly and nervously*]

Oh poverty! Poverty! Poverty!

[*A pause*]

KATIE

An' mother says 't you learned t' make flowers when you was only ten.

MARY

Yes, dear; an' it 's jes' as hard t' keep the wolf from the door now, as it was then.

KATIE

There ain't no wolves round here?—Is there, Mary?

[*Pause*]

Is there?

MARY

No, of course not!—ye see, dear, ye can't make a flower.

KATIE

[*Putting the stuff back on the table with a gesture of discouragement*]

Oh, I'm so hungry!

MARY

[*As she discovers* JOHN LACEY *passing window Right*]

Deary!

[*She rises hastily and draws* KATIE *from her stool to her side*]

I've jes' remembered! Mrs. Jones's Lizzie said, "Can't Katie come over an' do lessons with me?" An' I said "Yes." O' course . . . Lizzie's a bright girl in school, ye know; s' run along, now, dear; she'll be waitin' fer ye. . . . Here's yer coat!

[*She snatches it from the foot of the bed*

and slips it on the child, hustling her to the door]

KATIE

[*Hanging back*]

But I'm hungry!

MARY

Ye know ye've had yer share, dear. . . . If I can get somethin' fer ye, I'll save it . . . there, now!

[*Kissing her*]

Run along!

[*Exit* KATIE *in collision with* JOHN, *who gives her a hug*]

[*Enter* JOHN LACEY, *shutting the door behind him. He is a hard-worked but wiry little man of fifty with a shock of iron-grey hair, keen, kindly eyes, and a mouth and jaw grimly set; he wears a labourer's shirt, a short coat, and an old cap which he removes from his head and hangs on a hook near the door.*]

JOHN

Poor kiddie! . . . She's near starved t' pure skin an' bones!

KATHERINE

It's dark now, Mary.

[Proceeding to place the clothes from the clothes-horse into the wash-basket; with a sigh]

Yes, it's a hard life, but we should be thankful to the Lord fer little. Some folks has less, John Lacey.

JOHN

Ha!

[With a gesture of hopelessness equivalent to saying, "What's the use of arguing with her?" he takes up the poker, pokes the fire, and seats himself on the soap-box near it in an attitude of great dejection and weariness]

MARY

[Lighting two lamps near cupboard]

Thankful t' th' Lord. . . . As if He could have anythin' t' do with it!

[She carries one lamp to the work-table, sits and works]

KATHERINE

[Folding a garment for the basket]

It's sinful t' complain, John Lacey!

JOHN

[*Rising and throwing up his hands*]

No, don't complain! Don't complain! When they work ye t' death in the mills, an' starve ye t' death in the strike, don't complain! When they live like lords on the strength o' yer hands an' the sweat o' yer brow an' chuck ye on the scrap-heap when they're through with ye, don't complain! . . . No, be meek! Be mild! Be like an ox under th' yoke! Let 'em grind ye an' starve ye t' th' limit of endurance! The *Lord* made *them* rich, an' *you* poor. *Pah!*

[*He snatches a garment from the clothes-rack*]

Look at the labour on this thing: this bit o' lace at the bottom; it'd be enough t' feed us fer two weeks——

KATHERINE

[*Attempting to take the garment from him*]

John, ye'll crumple it.

JOHN

I'd like t' crumple *them*, th' beasts! Leggo, Kate! . . . An' look at this bit o' lace here! . . . There's labour in *that*, I tell ye! Some

poor old soul who blames it all on th' good Lord has maybe gone blind over th' makin' of it. . . . The cost o' this 'd keep our Nellie in shoes for six months—an' Katie, too, fer that matter—or pay our Bennie's doctor bills—or maybe he wouldn't have got sick at all if we'd 'a' had the price o' this finery . . . Here, take the damned white things back t' th' boss's wife——

KATHERINE

[*Taking the garment and placing it in the basket*]

God forgive ye, John.

JOHN

An' she'll tell ye with her pleasantest smile, damn her, that she don't "require yer services no more."

[KATHERINE *looks up sharply*]

Yes, the boss o' th' mills 's found out that Joe's been leadin' the young fellers in th' strike; an' Joe bein' engaged t' Mary— *They* know the game o' crushin' us all right . . . an' the Lord didn't teach 'em neither.

KATHERINE

[Meekly throwing the red shawl about her head and shoulders and carrying the basket of clothes to the door]

Oh, I don't believe she'd do it! She's a charitable lady, an' she's always sayin' as how them that th' Lord has given great riches should help th' poor . . . she knows me fer a God-fearin' woman . . . we go t' th' same church——

JOHN

That won't save ye when the boss's profits is at stake.

KATHERINE

John! John! Ye always will talk so bitter. If th' Lord has given 'em better brains an' more o' th' things o' this world, it's not our place to question God's will.

JOHN

God's will! The devil's will, Kate! An' if yer preacher was an honest man he 'd tell ye the truth about it.

KATHERINE

[As JOHN *opens the door for her]*

God forgive yer blasphemy, John—Mary, ye'll take good care o' Ben . . . an' watch out fer th' doctor?

MARY

[*Rising*]

Yes, Mother.

[*Exit* KATHERINE]

MARY

[*To herself*]

The doctor! . . .

JOHN

[*Shutting the door*]

Th' cowardly, miserable preacher!

MARY

[*Going to the cupboard*]

Father, why do ye call him that? Is he any more t' blame than th' rest of us who're tied down t' our bread an' butter? . . . Poor old man! If he depended on *us* fer a livin' 'stead of on the rich he'd maybe preach *our* gospel.

JOHN

[*With hands in his pockets and head bowed*]

I guess ye're right, daughter. . . . Where did you get *them* idees from?

MARY

McCarthy, th' man that's made ye all put up this fight in the mills.

JOHN

I guess he's right. . . .

MARY

[*Setting a quarter loaf of bread on the table Left, some jam, and a cup of tea*]

Here's yer supper, Father. Ye haven't had nothin' t' day.

JOHN

Have you, Mary?

MARY

No, Dad.

JOHN

[*Cutting off a slice of bread, putting jam on it, and offering it to* MARY]

Here. We'd better share it.

MARY

No, thank ye. I'm not. . . . Yes! I think I will—jes' this one.

JOHN

[*Looking anxiously after her as she takes the bread and goes*]

Been workin' very hard, eh? . . .

[*As she places the slice of bread on the end of her work-table and* KATIE'S *stool near the slice of bread*]

Poor youngster! The heavy end o' the pack's on *your* shoulders. Jes' ye wait till this long strike's over, little girl!—Ye'll get a bit of a rest then.

MARY

Have ye seen—Joe today?

JOHN

[*Eating ravenously*]

Yes. At the meetin' . . . he said to be sure an' tell ye he's comin' over t'night. . . . I told him as how ye were lookin' kinder pale and worried-like . . . his not comin' 'round fer over a week now. . . . He said he was jes' so busy with th' strike. . . . He *has* been pretty busy with th' boys, Mary. . . . How's Bennie?

MARY

[Moving toward table Left]

Ye can't tell . . . they're sech helpless little things.

JOHN

[Pause. With a sigh]

C'n ye gimme a little more tea, Mary?

MARY

[Moving eagerly to get it]

Sure, Father. It's pretty cold out an' it's good to get a little warm somethin' inside o' one.

JOHN

An' make it good an' strong, child.

MARY

[Looking into the teapot]

There's only a little bit o' weak tea here, an' there ain't no more in th' house.

[She gives him a cupful]

JOHN

Thank ye. . . . Is there a little more bread, perhaps?

MARY

No, Dad, there ain't no more bread. . . . No more food at all.

JOHN

An' no money.

MARY

Mother 'll get paid fer th' laundry t'night.

JOHN

[*With a burst*]

An' that's all she'll ever get from 'em, the pack o' hounds! They think they'll drive us back t' work by starvin' us out complete. . . . We'll die first!—The whole mill-full of us!

MARY

[*Clearing some of the dishes from the table*]

An' I'll get . . . there'll be my pay, at th' end o' th' week.

JOHN

[*Drawing* MARY *to him with a rough tenderness*]

What'd we do without ye, little girl . . . brave little girl!

MARY

[*With a dry sob*]

Don't! Don't say that o' me, father. I . . . I . . . I ain't brave . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . Oh!

[*She breaks down, slipping to the floor and dropping her head on his knee*]

JOHN

Why, child, what ails ye? Ye ain't well . . . ye ain't been happy . . . I've been noticin' that fer a long time—since the first of the year. Ain't ye happy with Joe?—Ye've been engaged t' him long enough—nigh two years now, an' ye had a soft spot in yer heart fer him long before. Don't ye love him, child? . . . But what's the use of askin' ye *that?* I know ye do. Is it the long time ye got t' wait till ye c'n marry? But then, what're poor folks like we t' do? . . . Come, come, little girl, ye're not well, ye're nervous. . . . Tell yer daddy what's the trouble.

MARY

[*Her sobs dying down*]

I . . . I . . . I . . . Oh I am . . . jes' . . . jes' a . . . a . . . little . . . nervous.

[*She rises and goes to the stove*]

JOHN

[*Contemplating her for a moment, then hastening to her*]

No, let me do this, child . . . ye'd better rest a little.

[*He removes irons and places them in the closet bottom of stove*]

MARY

I'll finish m' work.

[*She goes to her table and resumes her work on the flowers*]

JOHN

Ye're workin' much too hard . . . at least ye ought t' have yer evenin's.

MARY

[*Working nervously*]

An' make ye go back to the mills! . . . Go back on the men!

JOHN

[*Answering a knock on the door*]

Come in!

[*Enter* JENNIE *with a large dark shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders*]

JENNIE

Good evenin', father.

JOHN

Good evenin', daughter.

JENNIE

Hello, Mary.

MARY

[*Rising from her seat but working on a flower*]

How are ye, Jennie?

JENNIE

[*Warming her hands*]

How's Bennie t'day?

MARY

Not much better'n he was.

JOHN

Here, have a chair, Jennie.

[*Placing the chair Left before stove*]

I saw Henry in headquarters today. He was lookin' mighty worn. It's a hard strike an' we're all pretty near used up. How ye been gettin' on? An' how's Nellie?

JENNIE

It's pretty hard on all the men, Dad; an' on the women folk harder than the men even; but we manage t' scrape along.

JOHN

The youngster happy?

JENNIE

Wants t' come back home. . . . She asked Henry —Oh, I near forgot! Henry told me t' say as ye're wanted in headquarters this evenin'. The men decided t' have another meetin' after ye left. McCarthy's goin' t' talk t' them. He seems t' have got wind o' somethin'.

JOHN

[*With a long, low whistle*]

So! Then I'd better go right along.

[*He takes his cap from the hook and makes for the door*]

MARY

[*Going hastily to him*]

Father, if . . . if Joe's in the meetin' too, tell him I *must* see him t'night.

JOHN

Sure, little girl . . . he said he'd come sure, but I'll tell him. It'll probably be a long meetin' this evenin'. . . . Good night, child.

[*He kisses* MARY]

Don't worry . . . an' eat somethin'. . . . Good night, Jenn.

[*Exit* JOHN]

JENNIE

[*Rising and calling after him*]

Good night! . . . Here's a loaf o' bread, Mary. Home-made! . . . I baked today, an' I thought as how ye'd like th' taste of a bit o' real bread.

[*Pause*]

MARY

[*Taking the loaf of bread and laying it on the table Left*]

Ye're awful good t' bring it, Jenn. We . . . we . . .

JENNIE

[Going to cradle]

An' poor little Ben! . . . I jes' know how he worries *you.* Ye love these youngsters s' much. None of us cared s' much as *you* did . . . not even mother.

[as MARY *resumes her work at table Right]*

Well, I care too, but . . .

[Pause in which the child utters a cry]

Ye poor little feller!

[She rocks the cradle]

Yes, I care too . . . but poor folks like me an' Henry ain't got no right t' bring children into th' world. If it's a sin, *I* say it's less a sin preventin' 'em than bringin' 'em into a life o' bitter poverty.

[The child cries again]

Ye poor little mite!

[She rocks him, smoothing his crib for him]

Where's mother?

MARY

Takin' the laundry to the boss's wife. An' father

says as how she ain't goin' t' get no more washin' from 'em 'cause th' boss found out as how Joe's been leadin' the young fellers in this strike; an'—jes' because Joe's . . . Joe's . . . engaged t' me . . .

JENNIE

Has he been 'round lately?

MARY

He's comin' t'night, maybe.

JENNIE

How long since he's been here?

MARY

Over a week.

JENNIE

D'ye know why?

MARY

I . . . I . . .

[*She bends over the work*]

JENNIE

Ye've heard, then. . . . It's off wi' th' old an' on wi' th' new! . . . But don't take it s' much t' heart, sister. Joe's a good sort as men go,

an' he'll try t' get over it. . . . He's always thought pretty well o' ye. He wouldn't ha' got engaged t' ye after knowin' ye a whole year, an' give ye a ring an' all that, an' stayed engaged fer two years if he didn't care fer ye.

MARY

But he don't care now . . . he don't care no more . . . an' . . . an' . . . Oh, Jennie!

JENNIE

Why, little sister, yer heart's breakin'. . . . What is it? . . . It's not only th' other girl's troublin' ye? Mary! . . . Mary! . . .

MARY

Oh, don't ask me!

JENNIE

[*Leaning over her*]

But I will . . . but I must . . . it—it's somethin' terrible—Mary! I'm right . . . ain't I? . . . Mary . . . Mary!

MARY

[*With her face in her hands*]

Oh, Jennie!

JENNIE

Tell me, dear.

MARY

I can't, I can't, I can't! . . .

JENNIE

[*A pause*]

Then shall I tell *you!* . . . Shall I whisper t' ye . . .

[MARY *nods her head;* JENNIE *whispers something in her ear*]

MARY

[*Burying her head in her arms*]

Oh, God, Oh, God!

JENNIE

[*Pacing up and down before* MARY]

Good God, child! What'll we do wi' ye! . . . This is dreadful! . . . Oh, Mary! How could ye get yerself into sech awful trouble? How could ye let sech a thing happen t' ye?

MARY

Do ye think we was thinkin'? We . . . we . . . why, why . . . it jes' happened . . . I . . . I . . . was dazed, an' afterward . . . oh, Jenn, we was afraid! . . . We was afraid

all the time, an' wouldn't ever be left alone together.

JENNIE

[*Going to her and embracing her*]

When did it happen, dear?—Tell me.

MARY

Soon—soon after—New Year's.

JENNIE

Then it's—it's—When were ye—*sure* o'—o' —this, child?

MARY

Oh, Jenn! . . . I've been waitin' an' waitin' t' be sure it *wasn't* true; bein' afraid, but not bein' dead certain. . . . But nothin' happened. . . . Last night I didn't sleep all night jes' thinkin' an' thinkin' an' thinkin'! . . . *Fer I knew it was true*—Oh——

JENNIE

Poor child, poor child! What's t' be done——

MARY

[*Rising*]

The whole town'll tear me t' pieces when they get t' know. The neighbours 'll have nothin' t'

do with me, my friends 'll give me up—even my best friends . . . an' I'll lose my *job*. . . . They won't give work t' Mary Lacey when they c'n get all sorts o' better girls. . . . My work'll last only a little while longer, then I'll have t' quit. . . . Oh, I know, Jenn. I've been thinkin', thinkin'! All night long an' all day. . . . I seem t' 've grown a hundred years older since yesterday. . . . Why, Jenn, everythin' I ever heard came back t' me in th' night kind o' realer an' stronger like, jes' as if they never meant nothin' t' me before an' now they mean real big things. . . .

[*With a burst*]

Ain't I got a *right* t' my baby? Ain't it got a right t' come into th' world an' be cared fer when it gets here? No, they hound ye t' death till ye're glad t' hide in hell t' get away from 'em. An' it's race suicide they say? . . . It ain't me that wants t' murder my baby—it's them that c'n help me but won't, them that would treat me like I wasn't human no more—like I was a wild beast. . . . I want my baby—I want t' keep it! . . .

JENNIE

Mary, dear, ye mus'n't excite yerself like that. It ain't good fer—fer the baby, Mary. Here.

[*She leads her to the old sofa where they sit*]

Come, come. Of course, dear,

[*Patting* MARY'S *hands and talking very soothingly*]

of course, ye'll have yer baby. Ye must tell Joe an'——

MARY

No, Jenn, no. I can't tell Joe.

JENNIE

But ye must, Mary . . . you an' Joe must get married right off. There mus'n't be no more waitin' . . .

MARY

No, Jenn.

JENNIE

Why, what d'ye mean, child, of course ye will! D'ye suppose ye're goin' t' wait till we're all disgraced—till yer ashamed t' show yer face in th' light o' day, till all yer friends shun ye an' everybody points a finger at ye

an' calls ye a vile name?—Ye'd 'a been married long ago if ye both hadn't waited fer better times, but ye've got t' marry now, good times or not, ye've got t'.

MARY

I won't, Jenn. I've said it t' myself a hundred times t'day an' I ain't changed my mind—an' I ain't a-goin' t'.

JENNIE

But—Mary!——

MARY

It's no use, . . . it's no use talkin' about it. . . . Joe wouldn't want t' marry me now.

JENNIE

[*Leaping to her feet*]

Wouldn't *want* t'—wouldn't want t' if ye told him?—Why, of course he'd want t' . . . an' anyhow he'd *have* t' if he wanted t' or not!—Th' idea!

MARY

No, Jenn. First there's his crippled father an' his sick mother—an' he the only one lookin' out fer 'em—he can't leave 'em—an'——

JENNIE

Then why in th' name o' goodness didn't ye both remember——

MARY

Jenn!——

JENNIE

Oh, yes, dear, I understand; jes' lost yer heads. But now ye've got t' take th' consequences, you an' Joe,—ye've got t' get married whether ye c'n afford it or not.

MARY

[*Going to the window Left*]

But affordin' it ain't all—it ain't all. He's been crazy fer Bertha Mason since he's set eyes on her, ye know he has, an' look at this letter from Sallie Jamison. She knows, she sees 'em, an' d'ye think I'd make him marry me when he—he—don't care fer me no more. . . .

JENNIE

[*Looking at the letter and pacing the floor*]

He'll get over Bertha Mason—he's got t'!—He's

got t' stand by ye—an' stand by th' baby, gettin' over it or not gettin' over it.

[*She returns the letter*]

MARY

No, I won't have him like that. . . . I won't! Even if—I—have t'——

JENNIE

[*Stopping short and facing* MARY]

If ye have t'—what? Ye're not gettin' foolish notions into yer head, are ye? Tell me, what 're ye thinkin' about?

MARY

I—I—can't marry Joe. That's settled, settled fer good. An' if ye tell Joe he'll—Are ye goin' t', Jenn?

JENNIE

Why no, dear. Not if ye don't want me t'. But *you* must tell him!—*You* must tell him yerself!

MARY

I'm not a-goin' t'. I'll try t' find a way out, somehow . . . some other way out. An' if I can't—I'll. . . . But ye must keep this—this—secret with me, Jenn. . . . Promise!

Please promise! . . . I had t' tell someone —I—I couldn't keep it t' myself—it was killin' me—an' I couldn't tell mother—she wouldn't understand at all, an'—an' father—father's s' worried already an' has such a temper at times—an' it'd break him up s' terrible! . . . Then there was you . . . an' I thought ye'd understand how I feel about marryin' Joe now, an'—an' it 'd be easier for me t'—t' . . .

JENNIE

T' what, dear? Come, ye must try t' bear up an' not go on so, Mary. . . . I won't say anythin' to a soul if ye like . . . an' it'd be easier fer ye t'—what?—dear. . . . Come tell me.

MARY

[*Sinking into her seat by the table Right*]

Oh, ye mus'n't, mus'n't ever breathe a word t' any one—never, no matter what happens. Jenn—th' doctor's comin' t' see Bennie—t' night, maybe. I'd heard once how—how . . . It was jes' some talk, how th' boss's daughter was—was—sick, an' how she got over it—how a doctor helped her; an' how—

everybody was told it was—somethin' else—but it wasn't. I—I—I thought I'd—ask th' doctor t'—t'——

JENNIE

Well, dear?

MARY

T'—help me——

JENNIE

Help ye—

MARY

[*With a burst*]

S' I'll keep my job—an' my friends—s' father won't—won't be s' terribly angry—s' Joe won't *have* t' marry me . . .

[*Long pause*]

JENNIE

I see. I see.

[*She contemplates* MARY *with compassion, goes to her as she rises, and enfolds her in her arms*]

MARY

[*Extricating herself*]

An'—an—Joe's maybe comin' any minute, an,' Jennie, I'd like t' speak t' him by himself. . . .

JENNIE

[*Glancing at the time*]

Oh—of course, dear; ye must have a good talk with him——

[*Taking her shawl and making ready to go*]

MARY

Ye understand, Jenn. I—I'd want ye t' stay but I want t' see him alone an'——

JENNIE

Of course, dear, I understand—I understand.

[*They pause together at the door*]

Good night, Mary.

[*She lifts* MARY'S *face between her two hands and kisses her*]

Poor little Mary!—Good night!

MARY

Good night, Jenn. Ye *won't* say a word!

JENNIE

Don't worry, little sister—jes' as if ye hadn't told me.

[*Exit* JENNIE]

[MARY *shuts the door, turns to the picture of the Madonna and Child, lifts her*

hands to it sinking slowly until she crouches on the floor beneath it. Fumbling in her blouse she draws forth the letter, smooths it out against her breast, searches with her finger moving slowly down the page, pauses and reads]

You—saw—at—the—dance—how—he—couldn't—take—his—eyes—off'n her.

[*She pauses, gazing blankly into space, then, seeking another phrase with the moving finger, she reads again*]

Maybe—he'll—get—over—it . . . an' maybe—he—won't.

[*She crushes the letter in her hand, looking about the room like a trapped thing. With a sudden movement, she thrusts the letter back into her blouse, rises and laughs hysterically. Her laughter dies out into a sob. She stands still for a moment, then, rousing herself, suddenly rushes to washstand, washes face and hands hurriedly, hurries back to her work-table, takes from a drawer a bit of cracked mirror in which she attempts to view herself; finds a comb with which she smooths back her hair, then hurries behind the curtain to the alcove and*

returns with a piece of faded blue ribbon which she makes into a bow and fastens in her hair, again trying to view herself in the bit of glass which she stands against the vase containing the American Beauty rose. She takes the rose from the vase and tries it in her hair, but returns it to its place with a sigh. There is a knock on the door]

[*Thrusting the bit of glass and comb back into their places and shutting the drawer and adjusting her blouse and belt, she sits and busies herself with her work, singing out with an affected cheeriness*]

C–o–m–e!

[*Enter* JOE, *a young mill-hand of two-and twenty; good-looking, strong in body and tall; one would call him a good fighter, but he is shy and uncertain in the following interview*]

MARY

Hello, Joe!

JOE

[*Removing his cap*]

Hello, Mary. How are ye?

MARY

Oh, so-so!

JOE

[*By stove*]

It's—pretty cold out.

MARY

Yes.

[*Pause*]

JOE

We're havin' a pretty tough time with this strike, allright.

MARY

Ye-es.

[*Pause*]

JOE

The boys 're stickin' it out fine, though.

MARY

Ye-es.

[*Pause*]

So Father says.

JOE

I jes' saw him in the meetin'—he said ye wanted t' see me this evenin'——

MARY

I—want t'—ye-es——

[*Rising and continuing work on a flower*]

JOE

I was comin', anyhow.

MARY

[*Half dragging her chair towards stove*]

Ye better sit, Joe.

JOE

[*Coming quickly forward*]

Let me, Mary.

[*He sets chair by stove*]

H-how d'ye feel?

[*He fetches chair from Left and both sit*]

Tell me, how d'ye feel, Mary?

MARY

Oh, so-so!

JOE

Th-that ain't tellin' me.

[*Pause*]

Are—ye *well?*

MARY

Oh, yes.

[*Pause*]

JOE

N-nothin'—*happened?*

MARY

[*Shaking her head in the negative and bending it low*]

Um-m.

JOE

[*Leaning forward and touching her hand*]

Mary——

MARY

[*Snatching her hand away and clutching at her blouse with the other*]

Don't!——

JOE

Why, Mary, ye—ye *are* sick!

MARY

[*Springing up from her chair*]

No, I ain't sick, Joe. I ain't sick—I'm well enough. I only been thinkin'—thinkin'——as how ye ain't—kissed me yet——

JOE

Oh, Mary!—I——

MARY

No, no! Joe. Don't try t' now. 'Tain't no use now. . . . Ye don't care fer me no more. . . . I *know* ye don't *now*——

JOE

Why, Mary——

MARY

Oh, I know it, Joe, an' ye ain't a-goin' t' deny it, either. Ye're in love with another girl—an' it's Bertha Mason——

JOE

But, Mary——

MARY

An' ye see her home from work every night—an' ye ain't had time t' see me—I ain't nobody t' ye no more——

JOE

But Mary, it ain't——

MARY

O' course, o' course, Bertha Mason's awful good-lookin', a lot better lookin' 'n me——

JOE

Mary! I'm—I'm goin' t' marry ye—I'm goin' t' stand by ye, ye understan'. I'm

engaged t' ye an' I'm goin' t' stick. Never mind my feelin's. I'll—I'll try t' get over 'em. . . . Honest, Mary, I will. . . . I'm goin' t' stand by ye.

MARY

I ain't a-goin' t' let ye, Joe. Look straight at me—so!—an' tell me ye don't love Bertha Mason. . . . See, ye can't. . . . An' I ain't a-goin' to have no man what don't care fer me.

[With difficulty pulling a ring from her finger]

So I wanted t' see ye, so's I could give ye back—this.

JOE

Mary——

MARY

Take it, Joe—please take it.

JOE

Why, no, Mary; what d'ye take me fer, anyhow! I—I—can't take it back an' I ain't a-goin' t'. It—it—ain't fair, it ain't right!

MARY

An' d'ye think it's right an' fair t' make ye marry me when ye don't care fer me no more?

An' fer me—t' go on livin' with ye day after day, *every* day—like *that?*—Ye *must* take it, Joe, ye must.

JOE

[*Moving to the door*]

No, n-no, ye must keep it! . . . Ye—ye *ain't* well,—Mary.

[*He is about to support her as she sways a little—there is a knock on the door*]

MARY

[*Bracing herself and going toward the door with effort*]

Quick, Joe, quick! Take the ring an' go!

JOE

N-no, no!

MARY

[*As the knock is heard again*]

Come in!

[*The door opens and the* DOCTOR, *a tall thin man of middle age, walks in, carrying a satchel*]

DOCTOR

[*Breezily and with zest*]

Good evening, Miss Mary.

MARY

Good evenin', Doctor.

DOCTOR

Sorry to be so late—This was a busy day for me.

JOE

[*In a whisper*]

Mary, ye are sick.

MARY

N-no, Joe, I—I'm all right—it's Bennie. He's been sick near a week—please go——

[*As he goes doubtingly*]

Here——

[*Trying to make him take the ring*]

JOE

N-no, Mary.

[*Exit* JOE]

MARY

[*Rushing to the cradle, covering it entirely with an old blanket; then to window and opening it*]

Joe? Here, Joe, ye *must.*

[*She throws ring out as* JOE *passes*]

There, it's by the lamp-post.

[*She shuts the window and pulls down the blind*]

DOCTOR

[*Searching in his bag*]

How's the boy,—better?

[*Extracting a bottle and musing over it*]

Eh? Miss Mary, how is he?

MARY

[*Removing blanket from cradle*]

'Bout the same, Doctor.

DOCTOR

[*Taking out another bottle and studying it*]

Well, we'll pull him through, I guess. Has he slept much?

MARY

Yes—a lot.

DOCTOR

[*Going to cradle, watch in hand*]

That's good. . . . I won't disturb him. I'll just take his pulse—hm! Not so bad!—He's been getting his medicine regularly?

MARY

Yes, Doctor.

[*She carefully covers the child, rocking the cradle softly*]

DOCTOR

I want you to keep on with the same, and give him this besides, once every four hours. . . . How much of the old is there?

MARY

[Going to shelf and taking down bottle]

Jes' a little.

DOCTOR

I guess we'll have to renew it.

MARY

Here's what's left.

DOCTOR

Why, Miss Mary, your hand's shaking—you're trembling, and your face is white. You're ill! Just let me——

MARY

No, no, no, Doctor! I—I'm well, I—I'm all right.

DOCTOR

No, you're not all right—you're feverish—I guess your trouble is too hard work—worrying too much over the little brother as well. I'll have to prescribe a tonic.

[He sits, draws out a prescription pad, and writes]

MARY

I—I—don't need it, Doctor—please don't—anyhow, I can't afford no tonics—*please*—it ain't necessary.

DOCTOR

Very well, then, if you insist.

[*He tears the slip, puts on his overcoat with a swift businesslike movement, takes up his satchel, and moves to the door*]

But you're *not* well. Better not work so hard, Miss Mary!—Let's see, I'll be here on—

MARY

Doctor! Doctor! Don't go 'way! Don't leave me! I—I—I—want ye t'—t' help me!—Ye *must* help me!

DOCTOR

[*Returning*]

Why—why—Miss Mary! Something *is* the matter!

MARY

Doctor, ye—ye must help me, or I'll—I'll——

[*A long pause in which the* DOCTOR *regards her with a peculiar half-puzzled expression*]

Oh, I want to keep my friends, an' my folks, an' my work. . . .

DOCTOR

You frighten me!—What is it you want me to do for you?

[MARY, *working her hands nervously, remains silent. The* DOCTOR *comes forward and looks long and earnestly into her face, while her head droops low and lower until finally she sinks with a groan to her knees and buries her face in her hands*]

Why, child, is it possible! . . .

[*Laying aside his coat and satchel and sitting at table Right*]

Is it possible! . . .

[*Pause*]

But, of course, he is going to marry you!

MARY

No.

DOCTOR

[*Rising to his feet*]

The scoundrel! And I've always thought him a very decent chap!

MARY

[*Lifting her head*]

He is decent, Doctor. Ye ain't made no mistake 'bout him. . . . He——

DOCTOR

Decent, and——

MARY

He's in—love—with—somebody else now.

DOCTOR

Somebody *else!*——

MARY

An' I ain't a-goin' t' have him like that——

DOCTOR

Won't have him!

MARY

No, not like that. When he don't care fer me no more.

DOCTOR

You don't mean to tell me that you——

MARY

Nothin' could make me take him now.

DOCTOR

But, my dear child——

MARY

An' ye must help me, Doctor, ye must—ye must! Or I jes' can't go on a-livin'—I—I——

[*She approaches him on her knees*]

DOCTOR

Why, Miss Mary, you talk like—What's in your mind, child?

MARY

Don't say ye won't, Doctor; don't say ye won't! Ye see what'd happen t' me—I'd lose my job, an'—an' my friends'd go back on me, an' my father'd be jes' s' mad!—Oh, I couldn't go on! I couldn't go on livin' like that. Doctor, I——

[*Turning her face from him*]

I—want my—baby! But I—I mus'n't have it—I mus'n't!

DOCTOR

Miss Mary! Do you realize what it is you're asking me to do? You're asking me to commit a crime.

[*She starts and stares at him*]

You are asking me to take a human life—You are asking me to do that which would send me to prison for a long term of years. And your crime would be no less than mine. You want to—*murder your baby!*

MARY

Ah!

[*She utters a sharp cry, rises and recoils*]

DOCTOR

"Thou shalt not kill!"

MARY

My baby—my—my—I—No, no, no! . . . But everybody'll. . . . They'll jes' murder me an' m' baby every day. They'll murder us every hour in th' day.

[*She muses, shuddering*]

Shall it be killin' all at once, or killin' every mornin,' noon, an' night?—My baby! . . .

[*Rousing herself and with fierceness*]

Murder! Murder!—An' they send us t' prison fer this—Who sends us—the "respectable" folk that goes t' church on Sundays an' robs us on Mondays, so's they c'n live in fine houses an' wear fine clo's,—an' be educated fine, an' keep their looks, an'——

DOCTOR

Who's been filling your head with this stuff and nonsense about our best people?

MARY

Yes, defend 'em. Is th' boss o' th' mills ever arrested fer cripplin' th' men in th' works? —Fer killin' them outright even? Don't

they wring the sweat an' blood out of us an' buy laws with it t' protect themselves? Who's been fillin' my head—everythin'!

DOCTOR

A blatant socialist, more likely.

MARY

It don't make no difference, it's th' truth. Who's crippled Joe's father? An' who's left him without no help? Th' boss o' th' mills. He worked fer near fifteen years, an' when his hands was caught an' crushed, th' boss threw him out an' left him t' Joe t' look after, while he lives in the sweat o' Joe's brow. Joe an' me, we might 'a' got married an' had a home of our own three years ago; an' I'd 'a' *kept him true if I'd 'a' had him where I could be a-lovin' him every day*, even if we did have t' live simple; but with a crippled father an' a sick mother on his shoulders an' hard work, an' no prospec's,—an' wantin' a little pleasure . . . an' me gettin' tireder an' tireder all th' time—an' he driftin' along like, an'—an'—th-this happenin' an' kind o' scarin' us cold . . . an' a pretty face comin' along, an' makin' eyes at him, an' knowin'

he's not a married man, an' knowin' he's only engaged t'—well—jes' me! . . . I see how it's all happened—an' how it's all been fer workin' ourselves deaf an' dumb an' blind fer th' men in th' fine houses on th' hill, while we're starvin' fer real homes an' a little love, an' jes' go crazy fer th' lack of 'em. . . . Doctor, Doctor, don't say ye won't help me, don't say ye won't!——

DOCTOR

[*Sitting at table Right*]

My dear child, I——

MARY

[*On her knees*]

Don't say ye won't, Doctor. Save me, save me!

DOCTOR

[*Springing to his feet*]

Child, don't ask me to do it! It's impossible! —Criminal!—Heaven help us, in my profession we kill often enough where we mean to save! Shall I deliberately take a human life! No, no, Miss Mary, it's absolutely out of the question!

[*He turns to get his hat and coat.* MARY *clings desperately to him, clutching his clothing*]

MARY

Doctor, I tell ye plain, I'll take my life t' get out o' this!

DOCTOR

Good God, child, what a thing to say!

[Helping her to a seat on the sofa and taking one beside her]

You—you mus'n't think of such a thing. Here, now! . . . Why, Miss Mary, you are out of your head—clean out of your head.

MARY

Oh God, God, God!

DOCTOR

You have no right to say this sort of thing—you particularly, Miss Mary.

MARY

I—I have no—right?

DOCTOR

[As he follows her mental processes and gives her plenty of time after each suggestion to let the truth sink in]

No, you have no right! You are thinking only of yourself. What about your mother?—Your father?—your two little sisters and

your baby brother?—Yes, think of them. . . . Your father's on strike. . . . And there's no telling when the strike will be ended and he go back to work. . . . I understand your mother gets a little washing to do, but that wouldn't keep even herself alive, let alone the children. . . . I see you're aware of the situation! . . . Just for a moment you forgot, but you *mus'n't* forget. . . . You are the one support of your family just now, and at other times you're a great help. . . . They couldn't get on without you . . . . Don't sob like that, Miss Mary, don't! . . . It'll be hard, I know . . . but you *will* go on?—For their sake?—Say you will. . . . Come. . . . At any rate until it's less hard on them. . . .

MARY

It—it was weak an' foolish o' me—Ye-es, yes—I'll go on—I'll go on. There ain't nothin' else t' do.

DOCTOR

[*Rising and taking her two hands in his own*]

You're a fine brave girl, Miss Mary.

[*A pause in which he gazes with fatherly compassion on her while she hangs her head*]

I'm so glad to hear you say that. You should be glad for a more vital reason that I'm not willing to—to "help" you Miss Mary!

[*She looks up and he looks solemnly into her eyes*]

You love children; and I'm going to tell you what doctors don't usually tell girls who come to them in trouble as you came to me. It's this: that such interference with nature often results in a woman's longing for a child all the rest of her life—in vain.

[*She looks blankly at him, then drops her eyes*]

If I helped you as you wanted me to, it might have meant *no* babies for you—*All your life!*

[MARY *gives a hushed little gasp*]

You're a brave girl, Miss Mary—and—I'll do what I can to help. There won't be any charges for Bennie and I'll look after the medicine.

[*Taking up the satchel and offering his hand*]

And you won't hesitate to call on me whenever you should need me?

MARY

[*Shaking his hand*]

Ye're so kind, Doctor. I—I—*Ye're kinder than I knew.*

[*She rises*]

DOCTOR

And I'll be here tomorrow to look in on the child. Keep him warm, at all costs; it's important.

[*He goes to door as* KATIE *enters*]

MARY

Warm!——I'll try.

DOCTOR

Hello, Katie, pretty cold out, eh?

KATIE

Um-um!

[*Blowing into her hands*]

DOCTOR

Well, don't hug the stove too hard!—Good night, Miss Mary.

MARY

Good night, Doctor.

[*Exit* DOCTOR]

KATIE

[*Hopping about to get her feet warm*]

Oh, Mary, guess what I got!

MARY

[*Listlessly*]

What?

KATIE

Guess what.

MARY

[*Picking up the crumpled letter and throwing it into the fire*]

Give me an idea.

KATIE

It's something for you!

MARY

[*Going to washstand Left*]

Fer *me?*—Somethin' fer me?

KATIE

Yes, somethin' fer *you*—from *somebody!*

MARY

[*Wetting a handkerchief with water from the pail*]

Somethin' fer me from somebody?——

[*She wrings it out*]

What can it be?

KATIE

Well try to guess! . . .

MARY

But who's th' somebody?

KATIE

Oh, guess. . . . Just try!

MARY

[*Coming forward, slowly passing the handkerchief over her forehead*]

'Tain't no use, Katie, I ain't no good at guessin'.

KATIE

[*Holding out her closed hand*]

But it's something nice—something *new*—from *somebody* nice.

MARY

[*Going toward* KATIE]

Somethin'—nice—from——

KATIE

Why yes! Something awful nice. I met Joe as he was coming home, an' he said: "Here Katie, give Mary this ring," an'——

[*Opening her hand and observing it with disappointment*]

Why, it's *your* ring, Mary—what Joe *gave* you once.

MARY

[*Taking it from* KATIE]

No, 'tain't my ring!—'Tain't mine no more.

[*She goes to the stove and throws the ring into the fire*]

It's—it's all—right, dear. Only don't say a word t' nobody, now!—Not t' Father an' not t' Mother, nor t' anybody, will ye Katie?

KATIE

[*With a decided shake of the head*]

Mm-um! If you say so, I won't.

MARY

I know ye won't, dear. . . . Did ye do yer lessons with Lizzie Jones?

KATIE

No, I was so hungry! I couldn't think of them at all. . . . I'm *so* hungry, Mary!

MARY

[*At table Right*]

Here's a nice bit o' bread an' jam, dear.

KATIE

Oh!—Mary!

She sits on the stool near table and eats ravenously. MARY *contemplates her for*

a moment, looks on the child in the cradle, tucks the blankets well about him, goes to the stove and puts a few pieces of coal on the fire, almost counting out the pieces; returns to the table, again contemplates KATIE, *still eating, drops into a seat, takes up material, and gets busily to work on the flowers. But soon the stuff drops from her fingers; her head bends low, and a sob escapes her as*

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS.

ACT II

SCENE: *Same as Act I, two months later—a forenoon in early May. In place of the ironing board are two washtubs, each set on a bench.* BENNIE'S *cradle, bottom up, stands against the wall near window Right.*

DISCOVERED: *As the curtain rises,* KATHERINE *is seen disappearing through the door with a wash-basket full of newly washed clothes; then through window Left hanging them up on the lines in the yard.* MARY, *in a dark dress, her figure half hidden in a soft black shawl, is seated at table Left intently looking into a book.* MCCARTHY, *a man of about forty, clean-shaven, clean-featured, slightly grey and with lines of battle on his face and a kindly keen light in his eye, is standing beside her bending to see into the book.*

MCCARTHY

No, Mary, not close but *close*. . . . "The *close* of the nineteenth century." Meaning the *end* of the nineteenth century.

MARY

I see. Like the closin' of a door.

McCARTHY

Yes, that's it. Or, like the closing of a book . . . *close.*

MARY

[*With concentration*]

Close—close—of—the—nineteenth—century.

[*With a quick lift of the head*]

It's all s' strange—learnin' t' read good, Mr. McCarthy. Now here's close an' *close* spells jes' the same way; an' clo's, which is pronounced th' same way, 's spelled c-l-o-t-h-e-s!

[McCARTHY *laughs softly, half-amused, half-pitying; but* MARY *does not notice him*]

I *know* that is th' word fer I read it in this book somewhere, only yesterday. About th' clo's th' rich wear in th' cities, an' th' clo's th' poor wear; an' where th' rich get their clo's from an' why th' poor ain't got no clo's. . . . I can't find th' place.

McCARTHY

I know where. . . . Here it is. But that word's pronounced clothes!

MARY

Oh, I see.

McCARTHY

Clothes—Repeat it please, Mary.

MARY

Clothes—I see . . . *clothes.*

McCARTHY

Now spell the whole word out, and pronounce it.

MARY

C-l-o-t-h-e-s—clothes.

McCARTHY

Again.

MARY

C-l-o-t-h-e-s—*clothes.*

McCARTHY

So.

[*Shutting down the covers of the book*]

That will be all the reading for today—and your last lesson from me, Mary.

MARY

I'm s' sorry, Mr. McCarthy!

McCARTHY

But you must keep on learning. You're progressing wonderfully; and you're mighty quick at getting the meanings of words. That's more important than getting their pronunciations down pat.

MARY

I do try t' learn, Mr. McCarthy, try awfully hard . . . 'cause—'cause I want t' know.

[*Eagerly and anxiously*]

It's s' much easier t' get on with folks—an' with work—when a woman——

[*Carefully watching her English*]

isn't entirely ignorant.

McCARTHY

Quite right, Mary; and if all the workers who *don't* know would strive hard to learn . . . .

MARY

Yes, if they all would!—that book is right about it: "Edjucation—organization" . . . then they could do everythin' f'r themselves! I wish *I* knew how t' talk to 'em as you do, Mr. McCarthy. Ye do s' much good. An'——an'—yer children mus' respect ye lots 'cause ye *know!*

McCARTHY

[*With a gentle amused laugh*]

Well, yes—I guess it's good to know something of the world of thought. One can be of some use in the world. And as far as one's children go, they don't despise their parents quite so much—as they so often do when their parents are ignorant and without any schooling.

MARY

Unless the children start t' work early t' earn, an' never *have* no chance—*a* chance—t' learn.

McCARTHY

True enough.

MARY

As I did—But I won't stay s' ignorant—I won't!

[*Rising with her book and going to table Right.*]

McCARTHY

No indeed! Just you go straight ahead. You've learned a lot in the ten weeks or so I've been here, and you'll keep it up, I know.

MARY

[Arranging the flower-making material on her table]

Are ye goin' back home t' Pittsburgh, Mr. McCarthy?

McCARTHY

Sure. Now the strike's well settled and my organizing work's done, I'll be glad to spend a while with the wife and youngsters, till I'm called elsewhere. Oh, by the way,

[Taking a small red-covered pamphlet from his vest pocket]

here's something about the workers in the steel industry I'd like you to make out when you're along a bit in your reading.

MARY

[Thrusting her book in the table drawer and coming forward]

Thank ye, Mr. McCarthy.

[Taking it]

I'll try. Is Pittsburgh a hard place t' find work?

McCARTHY

It depends.

MARY

Fer women . . . for instance.

McCARTHY

Well, there are any number of rich women always on the lookout for "hired help." Why?

MARY

I was jes' wonderin', that's all.

McCARTHY

[*Looking at his watch*]

I've got to run along now.

MARY

But Father——

McCARTHY

I'll drop in later and say good-bye to your dad and to all of you.

MARY

[*Coming hastily forward*]

Oh, Mr. McCarthy, ye've been s' kind t' me! Bein' s' busy in th' strike, yet findin' time every day t' help me. I *am* s' thankful t' ye!

McCARTHY

[*Moving to the door*]

Oh, don't mention it. I feel the young ones should learn, and it's good to pick out the aptest, and help them a bit. The future needs 'em.

MARY

It's good of ye t' take it like that. An' ye'll sure drop in again?

MCCARTHY

Yes, indeedy. So long then!

MARY

S' long, Mr. McCarthy.

[Exit MCCARTHY *through open door. For a few moments* MARY *watches him from the window, as he is seen passing down the street. Then she starts toward her work-table, halts for an instant, goes to window Right, opens it, and calls]*

How much more hangin' t' do, mother?

KATHERINE

[From the yard]

Plenty yet!

MARY

D'ye want any help?

KATHERINE

No, no, child. Ye get t' yer own work.

MARY

Ye *sure* ye don't want me?

KATHERINE

Not a bit! A clear day like this I feel fine.

[MARY *turns away from the window and hurries back to her table. She draws a little flannel garment no bigger than a doll's from the drawer, sits with her back to the door and sews hurriedly, glancing back now and again, at the open door. As she sews, she croons in a half-conscious, half-articulate fashion. Now she straightens out the garment, holds it out at full length in her two hands, and gazes long, long at it, still crooning; she glances quickly back at the door again, then in silence lays it against her cheek with a low moan.*]

JENNIE *enters; walks over to* MARY *and places a hand on her shoulder*]

MARY

Ah!——

[*A sharp startled cry*]

You! Jennie!

JENNIE

Mm—mm! All alone?

MARY

Yes——

[*Hiding the little garment in the drawer*]

How ye shook me up!

JENNIE

What's that, Mary?

MARY

That—that's a—a—jes' somethin' fer——

[*Whispering*]

it.

JENNIE

Sewin'. How d'ye get th' time?

MARY

Steal a few minutes here an' there.

[*She takes up a bunch of Easter lilies and works in the foliage.*]

JENNIE

Now look here, Mary dear, I come t' talk t' ye about it. Ye've got t' do *somethin'*. Mother an' Father they're both worried about yer health. They complain ye don't eat an' ye don't sleep—that ye spend half th' night workin' when ye should be takin' yer rest. That ye won't go out o' doors, an' that ye won't see no doctor.

MARY

Wh—what d' they think? They don't say much t' *me.*

JENNIE

No, o' course not. They don't know what t' think. Sometimes they think it's poor little Bennie's death, an' sometimes they think it's yer tryin' so hard t' pay th' funeral expenses.

MARY

Those funeral expenses! T' spend th' last penny ye've got, an' th' last penny ye haven't earned yet—fer weeks an' weeks! It's jes' plain robbery, Jenn, that's what it is. When th' dead don't care nothin' about their funeral. . . .

JENNIE

Yes, but folks *think* th' dead care.

MARY

An' I mus' work my fingers off t' pay th' undertaker, when I should be lookin' out fer—th' *livin'* . . . th' livin' . . . that's goin' t' be!——

JENNIE

But Mary, Joe'll have t'——

MARY

[*Not hearing her*]

Well, I've laid a little by. But I've worked till now I'm near t' droppin'. An' I'll keep on workin' like this till I've saved——

JENNIE

[*Throwing her hands up in exasperation*]

Ye won't! Ye can't much longer! How long d'ye think ye can keep 'em ignorant? They should know right now. They think yer refusin' t' see Joe was jes' a lover's quarrel. Up our way now, they're sayin' Joe's *engaged* t' Bertha!——

[MARY *takes the news with a start, but immediately resumes her work*]

—yes, *engaged* t' her! An' *he's* been goin' aroun' tellin' everybody that ye give him up—an' she's goin' aroun' tellin' folks that *you* were a little fool an' that it serves ye right fer losin' a fine feller like Joe, 'cause ye didn't know how t' treat him right. . . . They don't know what's eatin' ye . . . they don't know a blessed thing! But soon Father an' Mother'll *see*, an' then—Oh, ye mus'n't wait! Joe may be married by that time, who knows!—Ye mus' let me tell Father.

MARY

[Rousing herself, throwing the flowers on the work-table, and rising]

No, no. Keep it t' yerself a little longer, Jennie, please. I'll do th' tellin' meself.

JENNIE

But *when?* Ye can't let this thing go on till Joe's——

MARY

[Calmly]

Maybe I'll tell 'em t'day, or t'morrow.

JENNIE

[Excited]

Oh God!—I don't see how *you* stand it! It's jes' kept *me* awake nights!

KATHERINE

[Who has entered with the empty clothes-basket]

Yes, she keeps awake nights, workin' an' readin'! Workin' an' readin'! till her blood's gone s' thin she's white as a sheet an' cold as ice.

[She sets the basket on the floor beneath the wringer on one of the tubs, and sighs]

There, ye see; that's th' way she goes about in

th' house, an' in May weather, too! Wrapped in th' old shawl as if it was December.

[She takes her place at the tub, lifting a piece of wet wash and putting it through the wringer]

MARY

[Coming painfully forward]

Shall I turn th' wringer fer ye, mother?

JENNIE

[Quickly placing herself before the tub]

No, I'll do it, Mary. You go rest a bit.

[They exchange glances]

MARY

[Hesitatingly]

Well, p'rhaps I will, fer a few minutes . . . before settin' th' table.

[She goes wearily to the alcove bed and sinks upon it]

KATHERINE

[Lifting her hands out of the tub and waving them pathetically in the direction of the alcove]

Ye see, child, she's sick, t' death—or tired t' death—I don't know which! An' she won't see no doctor, an' she won't let up on

her work at all. All day, an' all evenin', till late in th' night . . . jes' work, an' work, an' work! . . . She stops only t' read, or t' snatch a bit of a nap, like this. . . . The good Lord knows what's goin' t' be th' end o' this!

[*She is getting a piece of wash ready for the wringer.* JENNIE *contemplates* KATHERINE *with a strange look, and a shake of the head, but says nothing*]

She cared an awful lot fer poor little Bennie; mor'n his own mother, even; an' it's his mother that says it—an' when the good Lord took him t' join th' angels in heaven, ye know how she jes' cried, an' cried, till we thought she'd never stop! . . . But it can't be Bennie's goin'. She's had her spell over that.

[*Throwing her arms out again toward the bed*]

But look at her!

[*She wipes her eye with her apron and resumes her work*]

JENNIE

[*Putting a piece of the wash through the wringer*]

No, mother, it can't be Bennie.

KATHERINE

What d'ye s'pose it is then? . . . Th' water aint blue enough.

[*She goes to cupboard and searches*]

What do *you* think it c'n be?

JENNIE

Per'aps she'll tell ye—before long. . . . Poor child! Whatever it is, ye mus'n't be hard on her. Maybe it's——

[KATHERINE, *who has returned with the blueing, looks up at* JENNIE *and watches for her words with vague suspicion*]

JENNIE

—Joe.

[*She bends over the basket and shakes out some of the wrung pieces.* KATHERINE *gives the water the proper shade of blue*]

KATHERINE

Joe; yes; she's quarrelled hard with him! but it can't be only on that account! He comes one evenin'—Did Father tell ye?

JENNIE

No.

KATHERINE

Well, he comes one evenin', an' she jes' shows him th' door. Jes' as plain as that. "You go t' yer noo girl!" she cries t' him. Well, Father he was in th' house; an' he come near givin' her a beatin'.

JENNIE

Poor Mary.

KATHERINE

After Joe left, Father he jes' went fer her, he was that angry.

[*She pauses at her work*]

"What noo girl! Are ye gone clean daffy?" he hollers at her all red in the face——

JENNIE

Oh, don't I know how Father can get mad!

KATHERINE

Well, Mary she tells him quiet an' sick like: "It's Bertha Mason." Then Father swears somethin' awful an' says as how Joe wouldn't be comin' 'round if he was fer goin' after other girls. An' Mary she jes' gets all white an' tremblin' an' says, throwin' her head up sudden an' saucy as she never done in her life before, "Ye see," she says, "Joe's like

mos' other folks. He'd sooner do th' *respectable* stunt than be honest!" Then Father he slapped her face, he did.

JENNIE

Oh, mother!

KATHERINE

[*Resuming her work*]

Th' Lord fergive him! He was sorry soon after. An' poor Mary didn't cry, or say nothin'; but jes' went straight back t' her work.

JENNIE

Poor little Mary!

KATHERINE

But I don't know as it's Joe only that's troublin' her. She seems t' have made up her mind an' has jes' washed her hands o' him. But, of course, it *may* be Joe.

JENNIE

Yes, I think it may. . . . Here, let's take it out together.

[*They lift the basket*]

KATHERINE

Father says she'll *have* t' have Joe, that's all, whether she likes it or not.

[*They move toward the door*]

JENNIE

Poor child! Perhaps she'll change her mind, an' take him. But if she don't, don't you folks be too hard on her. She's been a good girl.

KATHERINE

Yes, God fergive us, we couldn't 'a' got on without her through all this dreadful trouble in the mills.

[They pass out into the yard with the basket, where they are seen a moment later hanging the wash up on the line.]

*[*KATIE *enters through the open door. She looks this way and that, and seeing no one, recites in declamatory tones and with extravagant flourishes to an imaginary audience]*

KATIE

"For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May."

[She stops centre of stage, and looks about her again and continues]

"You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear;
Tomorrow'll be the happiest time of all the glad New Year;

Of all the glad New Year, mother, the maddest, merriest day;
For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May.
They say that——"

MARY

[*Who has risen from the bed and wearily approached* KATIE]

Home from school already! We must hustle an' set th' table.

[*Glancing at the clock*]

Father'll be home fer his dinner in a few minutes.

KATIE

[*Only half hearing* MARY]

Hm-hm! . . . yes. . . . "They say that" . . . Oh, Mary! Teacher is learning us such a nice piece!

MARY

[*Moving to cupboard and getting a table-cloth*]

Yes? . . . Come, Katie dear, here's th' cloth.

KATIE

[*Taking it and proceeding to lay it on the table half using her arms at the same time for declamatory gestures*]

Oh, Mary, it's such a *lovely* piece!

MARY

[*Fetching the plates*]

Yes,—go on, dear.

KATIE

D'ye want to hear it?

MARY

[*Getting the knives, forks, and spoons, etc.*]

Yes, dear, go ahead.

KATIE

[*Standing off a bit, and with enthusiasm*]

Oh, listen to this. "I sleep so sound all night, mother, . . ."

No, that ain't the one.—"They say he's—they say—he's—" No, that ain't it neither.

MARY

Come, dear; let's finish this. P'raps ye'll think of it afterwards.

[*They set the table in silence for a few moments. Only* KATIE'S *lips are moving as she attempts to remember*]

KATIE

Oh, I've got *some* of it! . . . "The honeysuckle round the porch has woven its wavy bowers," . . . What's honeysuckle, Mary?

MARY

Well, it's—it's somethin' that climbs round a porch. It's—a vine.

KATIE

A vine?

MARY

Yes. Jes' strings o' green leaves that goes climbin' an' climbin' an' twistin' an' twistin' round most anythin' they c'n catch hold on.

KATIE

How d'ye know, Mary?

MARY

I saw it once on a porch, when I was a little girl. Father took me t' a cousin o' his livin' in th' country.

KATIE

Why do they call it honeysuckle?

MARY

'Cause there's a little flower on it that smells jes' as sweet as honey.

KATIE

[*In wonderment*]

Did ye smell it, Mary?

MARY

Mm!—yes. How it did smell! It was s' long ago, but I still smell it sometimes—in my dreams—an' when I think o' how some folks mus' be awful happy, th' smell o' them honeysuckles all comes back t' me.

[*They work in silence for a moment*]

When I dream o' havin' a little wee house—o' my own—with a little patch o' flowers in front of it—why, then! How that honeysuckle smells! Mmm!—Awful sweet!—

KATIE

[*Looking to see what there is in the single pot on the stove*]

Mary, why ain't *we* got no honeysuckle?

MARY

I s'pose th' smoke o' th' mills 'd kill it.

KATIE

Oh!

MARY

An' even if it lived, ye couldn't smell it through all that smoke. Nothin' but a few sickly trees grows round here.

KATIE

No, nothin' else.

MARY

The chairs, now, Katie.

[*They collect three from the room and* MARY *brings a fourth from the alcove*]

KATIE

[*Reciting to herself*]

"The honeysuckle round the porch has woven its wavy bowers,"—It must be awful nice in th' country—with flowers an' trees—jes' like in th' pictures in my school book!

MARY

Yes, it was awful nice when I saw it.

KATIE

Why can't we go to live in th' country, Mary?

MARY

'Cause Father's got t' be close t' his work.

KATIE

Well, why can't he ride in on th' train or th' trolley? Th' trains an' trolleys *they* go into th' country, don't they?——Don't they, Mary?

MARY

Yes, dear. But we can't afford th' fare. An' anyhow, th' mill people they've got t' keep near th' mill whether they like it 'r not. An' if we didn't use one o' th' Company houses th' Company'd bear father a grudge, an' they'd make it harder fer him in th' mill.

KATIE

[*After a pause*]

Oh, they're awful mean, ain't they?

MARY

Yes, they're mean.

KATIE

Folks mus' be awful happy livin' in th' country—mm!

MARY

I s'pose so—when they c'n make a livin'.

KATIE

[*Putting her arms about Mary*]

Oh, Mary! I wish *we* could live in th' country!

MARY

[*Patting her head*]

I wish everybody could.

KATIE

[*Brightening at a thought*]

When you get married maybe you'll live in th' country. Then I c'n come t' see you.

MARY

[*Patting the child's head and pausing; then hopelessly*]

Maybe, dear.

KATIE

[*Impulsively*]

Mary, why ain't Joe comin' here no more?

MARY

[*Withdrawing* KATIE'S *arms from about her*]

Hush, hush! Katie, we mus'n't talk about that, ye know.

KATIE

Why, Mary?—Joe—

MARY

Come, come deary. There's Mother an' Jennie comin'; an' another plate's missin' from th' table. Run an' get it.

KATIE

Hm—hm!

[She hurries to the cupboard]

*[*KATHERINE *and* JENNIE *re-enter]*

KATHERINE

[With a sigh of relief]

Well that's done. Mary, will ye set th' irons on th' stove? Some o' th' things are near dry already, an' I c'n start in ironin' right after dinner.

JENNIE

[Setting the clothes-basket against the wall behind the stove and following MARY *who goes to the door of the cupboard]*

No, let me do it.

MARY

That's all right, Jenn. I c'n do it all right—I c'n pick 'em up.

JENNIE

No, let me.

*[*KATIE *runs out reciting through the open door.* JENNIE *gets the irons and sets them on the stove.* KATHERINE *attempts to remove the tubs unaided.* MARY *comes painfully forward to help her]*

MARY

Here, mother. Ye can't do that all by yerself!

JENNIE

[*As* MARY *attempts to lift the tub with* KATHERINE]

Oh, Mary! Wait a bit. Let go! Let go! I'm stronger 'n you any time.

[MARY *moves away and, as the two women lift one of the tubs from the bench and pass Right where they set the tub near the wall, she turns and looks after them, clutching at her throat. The two women return and carry the other tub away, setting it beside the first.* MARY *carries one of the wooden benches half way over*]

JENNIE

[*Taking it from her*]

Fetch th' other one, Mary.

MARY

[*Bringing it half-way where* JENNIE *again meets her*]

Here.

[JOHN LACEY *enters laughing loudly and heartily with* KATIE *clinging to him and trying to speak*]

JOHN

So—o—o! . . . Queen o' th' May eh? Ha ha ha! Queen o' th' May, eh youngster? I'll have t' tell McCarthy th' joke; he'll appreciate it. S' that's th' stuff they fill yer foolish little noodle on, eh?—Katie Lacey, what wants t' go t' work already—an' needs t'—an' who'll *have* t', in a couple o' years—Queen o' th' May! . . . ha, ha, ha, ha!—well, well, well!

KATIE

It's such a lovely piece, Father; it's——

JOHN

Well, kiddie, it don't cost nothin' thinkin'. Only—it does come high t' think ye've got somethin' whole worlds better'n ye've really got; 'cause then ye never tries to get nothin' better.

KATIE

It's a nice piece, jes' th' same.

[*She sits on upturned cradle and removes one of her shoes*]

JOHN

[*With a chuckle*]

Yes, a nice enough "piece."

KATIE

Oh, that nail!——

[*Trying to find the nail in her shoe*]

"The honeysuckle round the porch has woven its wavy bowers——"

JOHN

[*Hanging his hat on the hook and removing his coat*]

Well, Mary, dinner near ready?

MARY

[*Having put water in the wash basin*]

Yes, Father; here's yer water.

JOHN

[*Near window unfastening his cuffs and turning up his sleeves*]

Thank ye, daughter.

[*With a sudden ironic burst of laughter*]

Look who's walkin' down there across th' street! —old Handy Jackson's wretch of a daughter!

[MARY *starts*]

Look at 'er!

[KATIE *goes to her mother with her shoe and* KATHERINE *with the aid of* JENNIE *tries to fix it,* KATIE *watching them*]

Th' brazen-faced hussy! She's jes' as spry an'

prinked up as ever. I wonder if she brought her bastard back with her.

MARY

[*In a quiet husky voice*]

Oh, Father!

JOHN

[*Not hearing her*]

An' a married man he was at that. Why it wouldn't h' been s' bad if . . . hm! If I'd 'a' been in old Jackson's place I'd 'a' buried her an' th' kid before I'd 'a' let a bastard into my family.

MARY

Fath——!

[*She checks the involuntary cry and moves to window*]

JOHN

[*Surprised*]

What's th' matter, Mary?

MARY

[*Passionately*]

It—it kind o' hurts t' hear ye say sech things. I——

JOHN

[*Going to washstand*]

Ye wouldn't defend that mis'rable critter, would ye? No child o' mine I hope will ever stand by that sort o' thing.

[KATIE *gets her shoe, goes to couch and puts it on*]

She did th' thing of her own will an' now she has th' cheek t' come right home again with th'—

[*He is checked by the process of washing his face*]

MARY

Don't say it, Dad; don't say it again!

KATIE

[*Standing up with her shoe on*]

That's better.

MARY

Here, Katie, quick; I see Mr. McCarthy comin', an' maybe he'll stay an' have dinner with us. Let's set an extra place.

[*They busy themselves at the task*]

KATHERINE

[*Producing a towel from the alcove*]

Here, John, here's a towel.

JENNIE

[*Whispering*]

Don't wait much longer, Mary; fer heaven's sake!

JOHN

Ain't there a cleaner one?

MARY

[*In despair but with quiet restraint*]

I guess I mus' tell 'em soon, but everythin' is s' peaceful here now.

JOHN

Ain't there a cleaner one, I say?

KATHERINE

[*Cutting bread at cupboard*]

No, John; I ain't had time to' do th' washin' yet.

JOHN

Ye been s' busy washin' fer th' immaculate high an' mighty ye ain't had time t' get yer own rags clean, eh?

KATHERINE

John, John!

JENNIE

Break it t' 'em easy, Mary. But break it to 'em. With all that talk about Joe goin' t' be married——

MARY

Yes, yes, Jenn; I will.

JENNIE

[*Glancing at the clock*]

I'll be late. Henry'll be home now. S' long, Mary.

MARY

S' long, Jenn.

[JENNIE *goes out. Through window* MCCARTHY *is seen raising his hat to her as they pass each other*]

MARY

Quick, Katie, another chair!

KATIE

[*With a swift glance about the room*]

There ain't no more.

MARY

That's so.

KATIE

I'll sit on the cradle.

[*She runs toward it*]

MARY

No, no, Katie, don't use that! Here, this box 'll do.

[*She lifts box near stove and goes to table Left with it as* MCCARTHY *enters*]

JOHN

Hello, McCarthy! Glad ye came in a moment before leavin' us.

MCCARTHY

[*As they shake hands*]

Couldn't leave without doing *that*, very well. We've fought a good fight together

JOHN

An' *what* a fight that was, eh? Think o' those blood-suckers! Two loaves o' bread more a week! That's all we asked! An' they nearly starved us t' death fer askin'. Damn 'em,

[*With a short bitter laugh and putting on his coat*]

but we got it!

MARY

Ye'll stay fer dinner, Mr. McCarthy?

MCCARTHY

Well——

MARY

Please—we've set a place fer ye.

MCCARTHY

Thank ye—I guess I can manage it.

MARY

It's all ready. . . . An' will ye sit here, Mr. McCarthy?—Come on, Father—Katie—Mother!

[*They take their places while* MARY *dishes out soup from the pot on the stove and sets the plates on the table*]

MCCARTHY

It's mighty nice of you to take me in for the meal. You hardly have enough for yourselves.

JOHN

There's always enough fer a friend. Have some bread.

MCCARTHY

Thanks. Won't you have some, Mrs. Lacey?

KATHERINE

Thanks. . . . Here's a little jam fer yer bread, if ye care fer it. Or, a little butter, though it ain't none o' th' best.

McCARTHY

Thank you. The workers never have the best of anything.

KATHERINE

I'm thankful t' th' good Lord fer what we've got. Some folks has less.

JOHN

[*Giving* KATHERINE *a look*]

This is mighty good bean soup, McCarthy. Try it.

McCARTHY

Thanks . . .

[*Embarrassed*]

Why, I—I——

KATIE

Why, Mr. McCarthy ain't got no spoon!

MARY

Oh——

[*Rushing to the cupboard and searching*]

I'll find one—take mine, please; I'll—why, there was one more spoon in this drawer. . . . Where *can* it be. . . . It ain't in here. . . .

KATIE

[*Jumping up from the table*]

Oh, I know where there's one! In Mary's table drawer. I saw one there the other day.

[*As* KATIE *skips over to the table Right,* MARY *moves rapidly from the cupboard as if to stop her but it is too late. The child has opened the drawer and discovered the little flannel garment.* MARY *stands still with panic as with a child's curiosity* KATIE *examines it*]

KATIE

[*Displaying the garment and moving toward the table, as* MARY *attempts to get to her*]

Oh, Mother, look! Mary's making a doll's dress.

[*Sensing something strange, they turn; momentarily there is a mystified look on the faces of* KATHERINE, JOHN, *and* MCCARTHY; *but this changes to the shock of revelation.* KATHERINE *rises and takes a step toward* KATIE, JOHN *throws his chair back and steps Center, as if wanting more room and air, a suppressed rage characterizing his entire demeanour as he sternly faces* MARY; MCCARTHY *withdraws to Left near stove and door*]

KATHERINE

[*Near collapse*]

'T ain't no doll's dress. Give it t' me!

[*She snatches the garment from* KATIE, *who is staring from one to the other in wondering innocence, and faces* MARY *who stands silently waiting.*

Mary!

[*She holds the garment up to her in silence*]

MARY

[*In a quiet, shaken voice*]

No, 't ain't no doll's dress.

[MCCARTHY *motions* KATIE *who comes over to him mystified and hesitating*]

MCCARTHY

[*Whispering*]

Come on, kiddie, I'll buy you the best cake and——

[*He draws her out of doors with him shutting the door as he goes*]

JOHN

Mary, come here.

MARY

Father, I——

JOHN

Come here, I say! . . .

KATHERINE

[Collapsing in a chair by table, with her head buried on her arms]

Oh, my God! My God!

*[*MARY *comes agonizingly forward but gains control of herself as she approaches* JOHN *and stands very still]*

JOHN

A doll's dress! Ha, ha, ha! . . .

[Snatching the black shawl from her shoulders]

A doll's dress? . . . a bastard's! . . . yes, shiver! . . . An' my own daughter! Makin' it fer her *own*——

MARY

FATHER!——

JOHN

Silence! . . . till I tell ye t' talk. Cold, freezin', eh? In May weather! . . . Hidin', lyin'; ashamed t' let honest folks look at ye straight. That's what it was! An' me blind as a bat —never seein' nothin'! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Put yer hands down—stand up straight! —so. . . . By God! I could strike ye dead! . . . *My* daughter . . . the decentest workin'man's family in town. Mary Lacey . . . John Lacey's daughter!

KATHERINE

Oh God, oh God!

JOHN

Here, stand up straight, you—! Come——

MARY

Oh—Father!

JOHN

That put-up job about sendin' Joe away—Hm! a nice piece o' business. He wouldn't have *you* after this, an' ye wanted t' keep us hoodwinked by pr'tendin' t' send *him* away, eh? Who'd 'a' thought there was s' much cunnin' in a quiet puss like that! Hm! an' Joe he fell in with yer little scheme——

MARY

[*Half-stunned*]

Oh, Father, I——

JOHN

The truth, now! *Who's th' man?*

MARY

—Ah!—Daddy! how can ye——

JOHN

Don't touch me, or I'll . . . Get away, ye stir the devil in me. . . . *Who's th' man*, I say . . . out with it! . . . ashamed, are ye? . . . but it's pretty late to be ashamed, ain't it?

MARY

[*Standing her straightest and looking squarely at him*]

No, I ain't ashamed——

JOHN

[*Striking her on the cheek*]

Hussy!

MARY

[*Quietly bearing up under the blow*]

—'xcept fer what yer sayin'——

JOHN

Eh?

MARY

Ask Joe who's th'—th'—man.

JOHN

Joe. Joe! . . . *Joe!* An' ye want me t' believe that, do ye?

KATHERINE

Oh, dear Lord!

[*She takes a look at the little flannel garment which she still holds and weeps silently, again burying her face on her hands*]

MARY

It's true.

JOHN

[*Unbelieving*]

Hm! true!

MARY

But I'd made up my mind I wasn't goin' t' have Joe when he was in love with another girl.

JOHN

[*With the doubt dying out*]

Another girl, eh?

MARY

I told ye th' last time I sent Joe away. He's in love with Bertha Mason, an' he's goin' t' marry her pretty soon.

JOHN

Marry hell! He'll marry *you* or he'll marry th' devil, an' I'll see t' that, by heaven! . . . An' you jes' bein' a kind of a lamb . . . hm!—Givin' him up 'cause he don't care fer ye no more . . . playin' th' angel, an' he takin' all yer sacrifice, eh?

MARY

Joe—Joe don't know, father. He—he don't know anythin' 's—*happened.*

JOHN

[*Looking at her in astonishment*]

Don't *know!*

[MARY *shakes her head in the negative with eyes downcast*]

JOHN

[*Picking up his cap*]

Well, we'll see that he does.

MARY

[*In alarm*]

Where're ye goin', Father?

JOHN

Where d'ye s'pose? To tell him the happy news.

MARY

[*Clinging to his arm*]

Father, Father! Please, please, don't go, don't!

JOHN

[*Impatiently shaking her off*]

Don't? . . . Are ye gone clean crazy, child? Joe don't know! I'm goin' t' tell him. Ain't that clear?

MARY

But I don't *want* him t' know.

JOHN

[*Doubt and anger overtaking him*]

Don't *want* him t' . . .

MARY

[*Flinging herself on his breast and talking feverishly*]

Daddy, I've been a good girl at home. I've worked hard. I've given ye every red cent I've earned fer years an' years. Day an' night, night an' day! I kept ye out on strike when I was near dead with workin', 'cause I wouldn't force ye t' go back on th' men. When Bennie died I paid on his funeral ex-

penses. I'm payin' yet, I'll keep on payin' though I c'd die t' keep enough fer—th' life that's comin'. I'll work my hands off fer ye at home here. I'll work my eyes out o' my head, day an' night, jes' as I have been doin', only let me live here quietly with ye all, an' don't tell Joe—don't, don't tell Joe!

JOHN

[*Softened but in a puzzled tone*]

Don't tell him? . . . But what on earth can ye be wantin' t' keep it from him fer? . . . He's father, ain't he? Ain't it his business t' know?—t' stand by ye?

[*Putting* MARY *aside sternly*]

No. No Bertha Masons fer him! He'll marry Mary Lacey, an' do it mighty quick too.

MARY

No, Father, no!

JOHN

Ye can't afford t' be soft in an affair o' this kind. Ye may care enough fer him t' let him go, but I won't let ye be sech a little fool.

[*He goes to the door*]

MARY

[*Throwing herself in his way*]

'T ain't that, Dad, 't ain't that. I *couldn't* marry Joe, Father, I couldn't! I'd die first. Daddy, oh dear Daddy! Don't go, don't go!

JOHN

[*Looking hard at her*]

Die first . . . *die!*——an' it's Joe, is it? Ye cunnin' little liar!——

MARY

Father!——

JOHN

I'll go t' Joe an' find out——

MARY

Father dear—listen——

JOHN

——an if it is, he'll marry ye before th' one o'clock whistle blows . . .

MARY

[*Blocking his exit*]

No, no, no!—Daddy, listen t' me . . . let me tell ye why——

JOHN

An' if it ain't——

MARY

No, ye mustn't go, ye mustn't go, Father!——
Let me tell ye——

KATHERINE

[*Weakly rising; in nervous alarm*]

Mary, Mary! Be careful, child!

JOHN

Damn it! . . . Leggo!

[*He hurls* MARY *aside. With a despairing cry she falls heavily near the cradle.* JOHN *goes out.* MARY *drags herself to the cradle groaning*]

KATHERINE

[*At her side*]

Mary, Mary, child! . . . Come, let me help ye up.

MARY

[*Not hearing—lifting her eyes to the picture on the wall above the cradle*]

Oh Christ! Oh, Mother o' Christ!

KATHERINE

Come, child; ye'll feel better by-an'-bye. . . .
Don't, don't! Surely th' good Lord 'll not fersake us. . . . Ye mustn't cross yer father; ye know ye mustn't.

MARY

[*Seeing the little garment which* KATHERINE *still holds, snatching it and covering it with kisses*]

Oh—oh—oh!

KATHERINE

[*Bending over her*]

Come, child; ye better let me help ye brush up a bit, an' stop cryin'. Father *will* have his way an' Joe'll be here soon.

MARY

[*Looking up*]

Joe—Joe—yes.

[*She rises painfully as* KATHERINE *helps her to her feet*]

Joe.

[*She gazes dazedly about the room*]

Well, I ain't got much t' take, an' I c'n easy make a bundle o' that.

[*She goes toward alcove*]

KATHERINE

[*Alarmed*]

What are ye goin' t' do, Mary?

MARY

I'm goin' away.

KATHERINE

Away? Where to?

MARY

[*From the alcove*]

Anywhere. So 's I get away from here.

KATHERINE

Mary, ye mus'n't go . . . ye mus'n't go away.

[*Moving toward alcove*]

How'd we ever get on without ye! Oh Lord, oh Lord!

MARY

Don't worry about that. If I find work, an' I hope I will somewhere—I'll send ye a little help now an' then.

KATHERINE

An' if ye don't find work, ye'll go all t' pieces . . . an' no roof t' cover ye, an' this—this thing comin' along! . . . oh Mary.

MARY

[*Coming from the alcove with a few bits of clothing and an old suitcase*]

If I don't get work jes' imagine I'm gone where little Bennie went.

[*She puts the suitcase on a chair, and moves toward the cupboard*]

KATHERINE

There'll be no one t' look after ye.

MARY

I'll look after m'self. At any rate, I'll take m' chances. It'll be better than bein' looked after by Father now.

[*She brings a piece of cord from the cupboard and begins to untangle it*]

Sit down, mother, ye're a bit shaky.

[*She brings a chair for* KATHERINE *near Center*]

There! Ye're a bit faint. Ye mus'n't let this worry ye, mother. It's hard fer ye t' have me go, I know; but it's harder fer me t' stay . . . an' marry Joe.

KATHERINE

[*Faintly*]

Th' father o' yer child, Mary. D'ye want t' jes' stay aroun' *un*married an' have decent folks point at us as havin' a—a—that kind of a child in the family? We'd die with shame!

[*A long pause.* MARY *continues untangling the cord*]

Why shouldn't ye marry him?—an' him willin' t' marry ye!

MARY

[*Coming up close to* KATHERINE]

I—I want t' tell ye some things, Mother. Ye never give me much chance t' talk intimate with ye, an' ye never talked intimate with me, but I picked things up, as most girls I know pick 'em up—jes' any old how—in ways that hurt bad, sometimes. But, it don't matter now. I'm goin' away, so I'll talk plain t' ye; for I've learned t' see things plain. I'm payin' fer seein'. But I s'pose that's how we all do—we pay.

Before I met Joe, when I was fifteen, Timmy Keller—ye remember Timmy?—ye used t' think we was jes' boy an' girl chums, but ye didn't understand—we was—in love. Anyhow, I *thought* I was in love with Timmy.

[*The mother stares at her with incredulity*]

Wasn't *you* never in love when you was fifteen? Maybe ye fergot it. . . . We——we——used t' go back in th' alley an'——an' he used t' kiss me so I'd pretty near faint. Then ——then Joe came along, an' I got crazy mad fer Joe; an' when Timmy'd come around before he knew about Joe, I hated t' have him, but I'd smile pleasant an' be nice t' him

'cause I hated t' tell him I didn't care n' more.

One night, as I was comin' out o' Sallie Jamison's house, Timmy caught me in th' dark hall, an' kissed me. I scratched his face, an' kicked him an' bit his arm, fer I was afraid t' scream an' bring down Sallie, but he was stronger an' he jes' held me, an' kissed me again—on th' *mouth!* . . . oh-o-o-h!

[*She shudders and repulses the boy in imagination*]

Over an' over again he kissed me . . . till I give him jes' one good bite that made him howl, an' he let go o' me. O-o-oh!

[*Shuddering again*]

I ain't got no way o' telling ye how I felt. I could 'a' killed him on th' spot . . . I could 'a' killed myself. I was through carin' fer Timmy. I was crazy—mad fer Joe then. After that time in th' hall, every time I used t' meet Tim on th' street I'd jes' feel as if I could die sooner 'n pass him s' close!

Then—then—long after, after I was engaged a long time t' Joe, an', an'—after——

[*She hangs her head*]

th—*this* happened, Joe meets Bertha Mason

an' stops carin' fer me—jes' goes daffy over her, as I went daffy over him! He don't care fer *me* no more now, than I cared fer Timmy Keller after I met *him*,

[*With a lift of the head*]

an' d'ye suppose I could be a Timmy Keller t' Joe?—D'ye suppose I could marry him, an' every time he'd kiss me to know he's thinkin' o' Bertha an' feelin' like I felt when Timmy kissed me? An' he'd maybe come home nights an' smile pleasant t' me, after he'd been seein' Bertha Mason! W'y, I'd go out o' my head with th' thought!

[KATHERINE *shifts uncomfortably in her chair and covers her face with her apron*]

Think o' *livin'* with a man—like *that!*

KATHERINE

[*Through her apron*]

Fer th'—child's sake, ye'd get used t' it.

MARY

Fer th' child's sake! Yes, it's partly fer th' child's sake that I mus'n't get used t' it. It's partly fer th' child's sake I ain't goin' t' live with no man that's th'—th' father o' th'

child an' don't care fer th' mother no more! . . .

[*Significantly, and very close to* KATHERINE]

Ye think it's good fer th' children t' live with fathers an' mothers like that. Ye don't know how th' children suffers when there ain't no love at home.

[KATHERINE *bends her head lower,* MARY *is about to put her hands on her head but checks herself*]

Get used t' it!—used t' it! An' look at Mrs. Parker. She got used t' it. Folks never get tired tellin' how she made Parker marry her when—when—what's happenin' t' me happened t' her. An' what sort of a dog's life has she been livin' all these years?—with a lot o' children now, an' Parker a drunken sot, an' them two fightin' around all th' time, an' th' children sick an' miserable?

KATHERINE

It's the Lord's will, Mary.

MARY

That's what th' minister tells ye. Ye wouldn't think so if ye did yer thinkin' fer yerself.

It's mostly bein' poor; an' some, bein' too respectable t' be honest with yerself. We can't help bein' poor; anyhow not yet, but we can help bein' so respectable that we can't be honest with ourselves; an' that's what Mrs. Parker might 'a' helped an' that's what I'm tryin' t' help. I heard folks tellin' many times how he runs around with other women! An' she havin' children with him!—like that! O-o-o-h!

[*With deep revulsion*]

Get used t' it! I'd rather do like Handy Jackson's girl, if I have t'.

KATHERINE

[*Horrified*]

MARY! God fergive ye fer th' thought.

MARY

I have a notion He'd fergive me sooner than if I went an' did like Mrs. Parker.

KATHERINE

Th' Lord fergive ye, Mary! An' t' think o' yer leavin' yer child fatherless!

MARY

Well, I'd rather have a child folks calls—th' names they do, than live with Joe th' way Mrs. Parker does with her husband, an' have a lot o' children that folks calls—legitimate but that ain't really——

KATHERINE

Mary!

MARY

That's really less legitimate than the Jackson girl's poor little baby.

KATHERINE

[*In a weeping tone*]

Oh—oh! Who'd 'a' thought my own child would have sech a wayward soul!——

MARY

If my soul's wayward, Mother, it's got so right here.

KATHERINE

[*Looking up*]

Right here?

MARY

Yes. Though ye ain't never taught me nothin'

by tellin' me things, ye taught me a lot by —sech things as I been talkin' about.

[KATHERINE *puts her head on the table and moans*]

Children see more 'n parents think they see. An' they think—an' suffer! in lots o' ways.

KATHERINE

[*Wiping her eyes meekly*]

We're all th' better fer sufferin', child.

MARY

[*Getting a few last things together*]

That's another thing th' minister tells ye, an' ye swallows it whole. Sometimes, I suppose, we are better fer sufferin', but sometimes we ain't; an' th' sufferin' that makes little children bitter is one o' th' kinds we ain't better fer.

KATHERINE

[*Rising*]

Here, don't ye want th' little black shawl too?

MARY

Thank ye, Mother, ye better keep it at home fer Katie.

KATHERINE

Yer wrong in leavin' home, Mary. Ye'll suffer a lot an' ye won't be any better fer it.

MARY

Oh, Mother! Can't ye understand yet that I can't stay? It don't seem no use tellin' ye things.

[*There is a knock at the door*]

KATHERINE

Come in!

[McCARTHY *opens the door and takes in the situation*]

Oh, Mr. McCarthy!

McCARTHY

Why, Miss Mary, I——

[MARY *stands slightly embarrassed before* McCARTHY, *but ready to leave*]

KATHERINE

She's leavin' home, Mr. McCarthy. Couldn't ye show her she's wrong? She has a lot o' respect fer ye. If ye'd only tell her.

McCARTHY

Leaving home?

MARY

They think they c'n make me marry Joe when he don't want t' marry me an' when I won't have him like that.

KATHERINE

But, Mr. McCarthy, Joe's th'——

McCARTHY

I understand what's happened, Mrs. Lacey. But if Mary's going to be the mother, and she chooses to assume the responsibility in the matter of the child, and Joe doesn't care for her any longer—is in fact, in love with another, and Mary has enough self-respect to refuse to marry him under the circumstances, it seems to me no one has the right to interfere.

KATHERINE

But her own father——

McCARTHY

Fathers are not always right in such matters, Mrs. Lacey.

MARY

[*Her hat and coat on*]

Good-bye, mother.

[*She embraces* KATHERINE *sadly rather than warmly*]

Ye mus'n't worry too much, an' I'll send ye what I can. Say good-bye t' everybody fer me.

KATHERINE

Oh Mary, child!

MARY

Good-bye, Mr. McCarthy. Ye've been awful good t' me.

MCCARTHY

[Looking at his watch]

I'm going, too, Miss Mary. My train goes in a few minutes and the station is close by. My wife will be glad to take you in for a while if you'll come along.

MARY

Thank ye so much! It's awful, awful good of ye, but I can't. Father'll be back in a few minutes an'—I don't think Joe'll tell—the truth.

MCCARTHY

You don't mean he'd *deny!*

MARY

He'll be s' scared! An' he not carin' fer me an' all that, he—he'll jes' . . . Then father'd think——

MCCARTHY

What?

[She pauses a moment in confusion then hurries out with face averted]

KATHERINE

Oh God . . . Mary!

McCARTHY

Good heavens! I can't let her go off like that. Where's Lacey?

KATHERINE

Gone t' fetch Joe.

McCARTHY

What for?

KATHERINE

T' tell him what's happened.

McCARTHY

Do you mean to say he didn't *know?*

KATHERINE

She didn't tell him.

McCARTHY

And she went——

KATHERINE

Because he was goin' t' bring Joe back with him t' marry them right off.

McCARTHY

How could she help going!

KATHERINE

Oh, you go too, Mr. McCarthy. Help her, an' God'll help ye sure.

MCCARTHY

I'll do what I can. Never mind the rest.

[*He rushes out*]

KATHERINE

Oh God bless ye, God bless ve!

[*She rushes to the window Right, as* MCCARTHY *passes. She opens it. There is the sound of a train pulling into a station*]

Oh, hurry—hurry, for God's sake!

[*She watches excitedly, leaning far out of the window*]

Now, now he'll soon catch up with her. . . . There! He's touchin' her arm. . . . They're goin' on t'gether!

[*She watches long at the window in growing excitement*]

Now . . . now! He's helpin' her on t' the train. . . . Now he's on too . . . oh, if John should see them before——

[*A train whistle blows*]

Thank God! They're gone now—they're gone!

[*Shutting down the window in haste*]

An' here's John comin' back.

[*She hurries draggingly to the sofa, sinking limply into it as* JOHN *enters*]

JOHN

[*Looking searchingly about the room, going to alcove, returning and gazing at* KATHERINE]

Where is she, Katherine?

KATHERINE

Gone.

JOHN

Gone?

KATHERINE

She wouldn't stay.

JOHN

Gone! . . . where to?

KATHERINE

I don't know.

JOHN

Did she go alone?

KATHERINE

Ye see, Mr. McCarthy——

JOHN

Ha! So . . . Mr. McCarthy!——

KATHERINE

She was goin' before he came, an' he said his wife would look after her——

JOHN

His wife! Ha, ha, ha! His wife! Joe denies it, Kate. Joe ain't th' man. His wife! Th' damn fakir!

[*The mill whistle blows*]

KATHERINE

[*Rising hastily and approaching* JOHN *with timidity*]

John ye ain't had none o' yer dinner yet, an' th' whistle blowin'.

JOHN

Dinner! . . . Which way'd they go?

KATHERINE

They got the last train. Ye heard it maybe, as ye came down th' street . . . they were on that. . . . John, take a little soup before ye go. . . . Don't stare like that, John! . . . There's the second whistle now; ye'll be late.

[*She makes pretence of examining the irons on the stove*]

JOHN

[*Rousing himself*]

Damn th' whistle! Damn everythin'!—I'm late anyhow.

[*A long pause*]

[JOHN *glances at the clock on the shelf and hurries out.* KATHERINE *goes to the window, looks out for a few moments, returns to the stove, puts on some coal, brings out her ironing-board, sets it in place, and goes out. She is seen a moment later, in the yard, a half-broken figure, taking the clothes from the line*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

TIME: *An afternoon in March, eight years later.*

SCENE: *Same as Acts I and II. The stove, some of the chairs and table are different; the medicine shelf is bare except for an old alarm clock; the picture of the Madonna and Child, worn at the corners, still adorns the original bit of wall space. The old bed stands where it stood, but the alcove curtains are now a faded yellow. The old sofa is covered with an ample piece of faded cretonne. The distant cheering of a crowd is heard before the rise of the curtain.*

DISCOVERED: *As the curtain rises* JOHN LACEY, *on crutches and his left foot bandaged, at window leaning far out and craning his neck to see. The cheering swells and dies down. For a time he watches, then withdraws from the window, pulling it shut, hobbles painfully over to the sofa, snatches*

up his cap, hobbles to the door, stops; contemplates his bandaged foot, with a rebellious murmur, throws his cap back on the sofa, returns to the window, opens it, leans far out, and looks down street as the cheering is renewed.

JOHN

[*Catching sight of the* DOCTOR *across the street*]

Mornin', Doctor!

DOCTOR

[*Crossing over to window*]

Good morning, Mr. Lacey; how's the strike getting on?

JOHN

The strike! Look there! Have ye ever seen anythin' like it!

DOCTOR

Too bad you can't go out too.

JOHN

[*With a restrained impatience*]

Gad! Here's th' great "Mother" addressin' th' boys, an' this old foot keeps me in!

[*There is loud cheering, shouting, whistling*]

DOCTOR

You must not get into a crowd, Mr. Lacey.

JOHN

And such a crowd! I never saw the like in this town before! Look there, Doctor, isn't that a wild one!—"Mother" rousin' 'em. . . . Now she's gettin' off the platform. . . . No, they won't let her.

DOCTOR

Looks as if the whole town's been let loose.

JOHN

Look at the way they're throwin' their hats in the air—an' the women—wavin' their shawls! An' the little shavers all excited!—It must be a wonderful speech t' make 'em act like that.

[*Great cheering*]

DOCTOR

I don't know what the world's coming to with so many strikes.

JOHN

[*Still looking out and hardly hearing*]

Banners!—transparencies!—flags!—an' what's that stuck up on th' stick the little feller's carryin'?—Looks to me like a loaf o' bread.

DOCTOR

That's so—it must be. What do you suppose he'd do that for?

JOHN

Wants more *of* it, I guess.

DOCTOR

Strikes are terrible things, Mr. Lacey.

JOHN

They are, Doctor. But we don't make 'em. We kind o' get trod on, an' we turn like th' worm.

DOCTOR

And that woman there—whom you all call "Mother" was in jail for inciting to riot.

JOHN

Yes, Doctor, but ye know, t' us workers it means a different thing. It means she got th' workers t' stick, an' some folks calls that riot.

DOCTOR

She was certainly courageous, even if mistaken. She looks like a Joan of Arc, standing up there on that high platform.

JOHN

But it don't say Joan ever wore a red sweater, does it?

DOCTOR

No, I guess not

JOHN

I wish it wasn't s' far. C'n ye make her out, Doctor; c'n ye hear anythin' at all?

DOCTOR

No, it's just a little too far. But I'll go and get a look at your famous strike leader—your "Mother"—before that adoring crowd swallows her.

[With a casual wave of his hand he goes off]

JOHN

[Musing for a moment out of window, then as a burst of loud cheering is heard]

Hey, Doctor! ye're late! She's off th' platform now . . .

[To himself]

Goodness, what a mob of 'em . . . they're chewin' her up alive . . . now . . . where is she? . . .

[The cheering is renewed; rising above it, can be heard the strains of the "Marseillaise" played by a band. Moving a little he brushes his foot against a chair

and groans. He sets himself, half leaning against the window, listening to the music but soon begins to beat time with his crutch, loudly or softly, as the music swells or recedes, then joins in a low quavering voice]

"The people *shall* be free! . . . march on!—march on!—all hearts *re*solved" . . . But . . . no, things go on—as—as if there ain't never goin' t' be—nothin' else. . . .

[*With a deep sigh he sinks cautiously into a chair. A few isolated shouts, then all is still. For several moments he sits silently musing*]

[JENNIE *flits by window*]

JENNIE

[*Entering with a burst*]

Daddy! . . . Daddy! . . .

JOHN

An' I missed th' speech, an' missed seein' "Mother."

JENNIE

[*Still breathless with excitement*]

Oh, Daddy! . . .

JOHN

[Looking down on his foot]

Damn it! . . . I was goin' anyway, but——

JENNIE

'An' it was a wonderful speech,—but—Daddy dear, this woman . . . that everybody's lovin' an' talkin' about—that all th' papers're full of . . . this woman that went t' prison with her little one in her arms sooner than quit th' fight in th' Pittsburg strike . . . this "Mother Mary" . . . Daddy! What MARY d'ye think she is!

[Staring blankly at JENNIE, *he struggles painfully to his feet, and as the look of suspicion creeps into his face, he utters a cry resembling more the cry of a dumb brute than that of a human; beginning in a low intonation and ending in an accentuated interrogation]*

JOHN

Huh?

JENNIE

[Flinging her shawl off]

Yes, Father; it's she!

JOHN

[*Sinking into his chair again and passing his hand slowly over his brow*]

"Mother"—"Mother Mary!" My little girl?——

[*Stupefied*]

Where is she now?

JENNIE

Now!—Right in the crowd, Dad, an' everybody jes' strugglin' t' shake hands with her. Joe's in the crowd. Ye should have seen how stunned he looked when he saw her! I left him there, him promisin' t' bring her here when th' crowd let up on her, while I hurried back t' tell ye.

JOHN

God! . . . My little lost girl. . . . "Mother Mary," Mary Lacey . . . my little girl . . . Mother!——

JENNIE

Think of it, Dad; think of it!

JOHN

[*Doubt overtaking him*]

Are ye sure it's her, Jenn?

JENNIE

Am I sure ye're you, dad? Wouldn't I know my own sister when I see her? There ain't no mistake. It's her as big as life. . . . A lot older 'n nineteen; but she's got lots more *to* her. Ye should 'a' heard her talk, Dad; ye'd 'a' understood how she'd 'a' had th' grit t' go her own way, an' never tell none o' us where she is an' yet have th' goodness to send a little help home whenever she could. An' her goin' t' prison, an' takin' her child with her . . . ye could understan' that, too.

JOHN

[*Turning from the window*]

An' me drivin' her out o' her own home. . . . Me! her father. . . . If Joe 'd only owned up t' th' child!—He had t' wait till Bertha died.

[*A murmur of the crowd is heard*]

JENNIE

[*Talking rapidly*]

Well, that's over an' past now. Don't let's regret what's done an' can't be helped. She's here,

an' she's comin' home an'—an' Joe's goin' t' bring her. Be good t' her, Dad; be good t' her now because she's earned it; if fer no other reason.

[*The murmur grows more distinct*]

JOHN

[*Rousing himself*]

If she'd only let me!—S' Joe's bringing her? . . . I'm glad o' that.

[*Distinct cheering*]

JENNIE

[*Who has excitedly been putting a few womanly touches to the things in the room*]

An' Father,

[*going to him*]

do give Joe a chance with Mary. He'll want it. I'm goin' out soon t' join Henry in Union Hall; p'raps you can take yer little hobble down the street when the crowds ain't around, an' there's no danger t' yer foot.

JOHN

Sure, sure, daughter.

JENNIE

Henry an' I are on th' Strike Committee, or I'd stay an' walk with ye.

JOHN

No need, daughter. I manage it most o' th' time myself.

[*A child's voice from street*]

CHILD

Is this gran'pa's house?

[JOHN *and* JENNIE *turn simultaneously toward the window*]

JOHN

[*Deeply moved*]

A gran'child!

JENNIE

Her little one!

[*She looks down at her left hand, fingering her wedding ring*]

But, oh! Mary'll get sech a shock t' see ye like this.

[*She disappears in alcove and returns quickly with a dark grey blanket which she throws over* JOHN'S *lap covering his feet too and concealing the crutches near him*]

There . . .

JOHN

[*As* MARY, JOE, *and* THE CHILD *pass the window*]

Mary, my little girl!

JENNIE

[*Snatching up her shawl*]

Poor ol' dad!

[*She goes quickly to the door, opening it on the three outside*]

Dear Mary!

[*She gives* MARY *a warm kiss and hastily pats the child on the head. As* MARY *enters with* THE CHILD *she beckons to* JOE *who is immediately behind* MARY. JOE *follows* JENNIE *out and she closes the door after them. They are seen to pass the window a few moments later*]

[MARY, *a little to* LEFT *of door, stands silently facing* JOHN. THE CHILD *looks questioningly from her mother to* JOHN. JOHN *raises his head and looks dumbly at* MARY]

THE CHILD

Is this gran'pa, mother?

MARY

[*With uneven voice*]

Yes, dear; run along!

THE CHILD

[*Rushing to* JOHN *who leans forward and encircles her in his arm*]

Gran'pa!

JOHN

[*Sobbing*]

My Mary's little one!

MARY

[*Coming falteringly toward him*]

You—you're glad to see us?

JOHN

[*Lifting his face to her*]

Oh, my little girl!

MARY

[*Coming swiftly, with half-cry, half-groan*]

Oh, Daddy, dear Daddy!

JOHN

My little lost lamb!——

THE CHILD

Kiss me too, gran'pa!

JOHN

[With a lift of the voice]

Sure youngster.

[Kissing her warmly several times]

What's yer name?

THE CHILD

Joey—Josephine Lacey.

JOHN

Joey!

[He looks at MARY *with a hopeful smile; but* MARY *looks away]*

THE CHILD

Hm-hm!

[Releasing herself and running to a chair]

Sit down here, gran'pa.

JOHN

Orderin' me 'round already, eh?

[He smiles to MARY *and attempts to rise]*

If ye'll get my sticks, child——

MARY

Oh, dear Father! . . . Accident in the mill?

JOHN

Yes.

MARY

[Getting his crutches and helping him up]

Bad?

JOHN

Not very, fortunately.

[They go to chair]

MARY

Thank God!

[Catching herself]

No, no, Daddy; I don't mean to say that. God hasn't anything to do with accidents in the mills. Greedy men are to blame, not God.

JOHN

Ye're right, child; ye're right. It's jes' habit makes ye blame God.

[THE CHILD *gets on his knee and looks at him wonderingly. He kisses her*]

An' you're—"Mother"—"Mother Mary"—the poor little lamb I drove out o' th' fold?

MARY

[Deeply touched]

No, Daddy; I'm still little Mary; John Lacey's girl; and you're still my dad.

[*Stroking his head*]

But how grey you are, Daddy dear; and so much older!

[*Looking wistfully about the room*]

And the house has changed so little.

JOHN

[*Resignedly*]

We don't grow younger in th' mills, daughter.

MARY

I don't see the tubs or the ironing-board. Where's mother?

JOHN

Gone.

MARY

Gone?

JOHN

She died five years ago.

MARY

[*Taking the shock with restraint*]

Poor mother!

JOHN

Th' heart gave out. She was bendin' over th' washing—like she was anxious to take another piece from th' tub. That's how we found her.

MARY

[Looking wistfully about the room]

Poor mother! . . . and now the mill owner's wife has some one else to wash for her. . . . And Nellie does your housekeeping, I suppose.

JOHN

Nellie couldn't find nothin' t' do here, so she went t' work in Pittsburg.

MARY

Pittsburg?—She helps you a little?

JOHN

She scarcely earns enough fer herself.

MARY

And Katie?

JOHN

L-left home a year ago.

MARY

Left home?—How?

JOHN

Oh, a man!—She wanted t' marry him an' he was a good-fer-nothin'. I wouldn't stand fer it so—she went away.

MARY

[*Contemplating him sadly*]

Poor dad! . . . you might have taken an interest in the heart of the girl——

JOHN

Yes, child; the lesson's come home t' me. . . . There's Jennie an' Henry left. They live here with me, an' Jennie manages t' keep things goin' here in early mornin' an' after work.

MARY

After work?

JOHN

Jennie's been in th' mills now fer about four years. Henry was makin' s' little, she went t' work, too—t' make it easier at home. But work's been unsteady in th' mills, wages poor, an' th' cost o' livin' high,—an' they find it no easier now than when Henry was workin' alone. . . . It's not quite s' lonely, livin' all t'gether,—like this.

MARY

[*Quite close to* JOHN]

Father! you—you talk so—so——

[*With deep pain in her voice*]

so *indifferently* about these things! Don't you feel them as—as—deeply as you used to?—as you did before—I went away?

[JOHN *gives a hopeless shrug of the shoulders and remains silent*]

Daddy!

[*With pain and rebellion*]

You used to—to—*revolt* so against this miserable slavery. The—the *fire* in you—years ago, it helped me all these years. . . . You don't seem to *care* any more! Daddy! You're so—*changed!*

JOHN

[*Rising slowly and painfully with* THE CHILD—*who has fallen asleep—gathered up in his left arm. Supporting himself on a crutch with the other*]

My—spirit's near broken, little Mary—"Mother Mary." Ye c'n stir th' young fellers; but few as old an' done-for as yer daddy c'n stay stirred—fer long.

MARY

[*Carefully taking the child from him*]

Oh, father!

JOHN

We're excited—while a strike's on; yes. But after—we jes' jog along like horses in harness.

MARY

[*Desperately and in a subdued voice*]

That's what the system does to some of us!

[*With fire*]

But it can't go on forever.

[*Going to the alcove*]

Some day—there'll be an end!—must be an end!

[*She disappears into the alcove*]

JOHN

[*Picking up his cap from the sofa with a sigh and a shake of the head*]

Who knows!—there may—there may not. . . . Don't forget ye're at home, child. I want t' hear—everythin'—when I get back. I mus' go out t' get my walk now the street's quiet. I ain't had none t' day.

MARY

[*Coming from alcove*]

But—

[*With concern*]

be careful of your foot, father dear. They want

me in a meeting tonight but I guess I can get the supper for us all, before I go.

JOHN

[Brightening]

An' get a chance t' eat it too.

[Placing his hands on her shoulders and searching her face]

Ye're goin' t' stay fer good, I hope, little girl!

MARY

I—I—don't know, Dad; until the strike's over, anyhow.

JOHN

An' then?

MARY

Then to—wherever I may be called.

JOHN

Maybe ye'll see Joe, soon.

MARY

[Buttoning his coat]

Now, Daddy; you're all ready to go.

JOHN

He brought ye here t'day. He—he's not happy, Mary.

MARY

He—married?

JOHN

[*Adjusting the dampers of the stove*]

Yes, that Mason girl. . . . She died in child-bed . . . first baby.

MARY

[*Getting a scarf from a hook on wall near window*]

Here, you'll need this. It's a little raw out when the sun's gone.

[*She adjusts the scarf for him*]

And don't go farther than the corner.

JOHN

Thank ye, dear daughter.

[*He moves to door, but turns;* MARY *kisses him*]

MARY

Dear father!

JOHN

My little girl!

[*He hobbles out; she watches his steps then shuts the door after him*]

[*Glimpsing* JOHN *through window wav-*

ing his cap to her in passing, she wafts a kiss to him. The gradual fading of the sun has left the room in semi-gloaming. She looks about her for several moments, listens toward the alcove, goes into it, returns with an apron; removes her sweater, placing it on a chair near table, goes to cupboard, putting on apron, finds a bowl, some potatoes, and a knife; places these on table, returns to cupboard, finds a pot, fills it with water from a pail using a tin dipper for the purpose, sets pot on stove, adds a few pieces of coal to fire, returns to table, sits and peels potatoes. After a few moments JOE *is seen in shadowy outline, passing the window. Soon a timid knock is heard*]

MARY

[*Half turning*]

Come in!

[*The door opens slowly;* JOE *enters shutting the door and pausing near it; looking but a little less timid than in the first interview*]

Hello, Joe. How are you? I didn't get much

chance to ask you this afternoon with the crowd at our heels.

[*Pause*]

Here, get this chair and sit down. There's a draught over near the door.

[JOE *timidly advances, getting a chair. He brings it to table and seats himself opposite* MARY. MARY *looks at* JOE *as if expecting him to speak; but as he says nothing, fingering his cap with eyes bent upon the process, she resumes her potato peeling. After a few moments she rises, goes Left, returns with a dipperful of water which she pours into bowl on table*]

MARY

You've been doing good work in this strike, Joe.

JOE

[*Not looking up*]

A little. I—I—hope it's good work.

[*Pause*]

MARY

[*Sitting and again taking up her task*]

How does the Union look to you, Joe?—Much stronger than it used to be when—when—er—eight years ago?

JOE

[*Turning with a sudden effort and facing* MARY]

I was a young fool then, Mary, an' a coward!

MARY

[*With unsteadiness and embarrassment*]

Why, Joe—I—I never blamed you for what—happened.

JOE

No, ye were too good.

MARY

Not that; I think I understood, that's all.

JOE

An' I didn't understand till I had suffered a lot; till she died—an'—an'—*it* died an' I was left alone . . . thinkin' o' you—out in th' world—with th' child—an' me th' father—an' what I had done t' drive ye out.

[*Leaning toward her across the table*]

C'n ye ever fergive me, Mary?

MARY

[*Quietly as she bends over her work*]

There's nothing to forgive, Joe. I don't regret

anything, and *she's* been a great comfort. What's past is past and done with. Don't let the thought worry you.

JOE

[*Bending further across the table*]

But I do, Mary, I do!—An' when she died, an' th' years went by, I got t' realize how fine ye acted an' how cowardly I was—never tellin' yer father th' truth till after Bertha was gone!

[*Rising and going to her*]

If I wasn't s' beggarly poor I'd 'a' gone out int' th' world t' find ye both.

[*Touching her hand*]

I love ye, Mary!

MARY

[*Snatching her hand away*]

Don't, don't, Joe. I—I couldn't bear it! *Please* don't!—Sit down, *please!*

JOE

[*With hands on the back of the chair. He has evidently received a vital blow*]

Ye—ye—don't—*care* fer me no more?

MARY

[*Shaken but with restraint*]

N–no, Joe. Not that way. That's—dead in me.

JOE

[*With unsuspected fury*]

Then it's alive fer somebody else!

MARY

Why, Joe!

JOE

That damned McCarthy, fer all I know!

MARY

[*Quietly and with gentle sternness*]

Joe, you have no right to talk like that to me. . . .

[JOE *walks a few paces away from the table, and returns*]

I hope you realize that. . . . Sit down, Joe. I'll tell you—everything.

JOE

Mary!

[*He goes back to his chair*]

MARY

I—I hardly know where to begin though I'm full of it, and my heart's bursting to tell.

JOE

[*Slowly taking his seat and bending, ashamed yet eager, toward her*]

When ye left here!—what happened? Begin from the beginnin'. Ye went t' Pittsburg.

MARY

Yes, into an unknown world—among strangers—with that life growing under my heart. . . . How *kind* Mr. McCarthy was!

JOE

[*Under his breath*]

McCarthy!

[*He moves uneasily in his seat. She turns her head, bird-like, to look at him*]

MARY

You're jealous, Joe. . . . You have no right to be. Besides, there's no cause. He helped me not because I was a woman, but because I was a human being—in trouble. They were willing to keep me—he and his wife—till after the baby came. But I didn't stay, I didn't want to burden them too much . . . five whole weeks seemed much too long. Then I found a place; scrubbing floors in a big building, at night.

JOE

Oh, Mary!

MARY

[*With a glance at him*]

It wasn't bad. To creep away in the early morning to my little bedroom and sleep through the day. . . . It was good, after being on my knees for nine hours. So tired, I couldn't think! But it was best for me not to. Seven dollars a week! Big pay . . . for me. I actually managed to save two out of seven. One day the man who hired me asked me where was my—husband.

[*Joe winces*]

I told him the truth. He discharged me. I was able to pay my room rent with the few dollars I'd saved, and used a few cents a day to keep from starvation.

[*Joe groans*]

But I was in luck. Another building needed an extra scrubwoman. I got the job; but I didn't keep it long. The—the baby came.

[JOE *buries his face in his hands*]

In a hospital. . . . There were many girls there like me . . . somewhat different stories,

but the same young, helpless look in the eyes—the same stunned looks on their faces. I mus'n't tell you the things I thought in that hospital—they were too terrible; but often I'd forget *myself*, watching *them*. . . . There was a kind nurse, and a kind doctor. It was like quitting heaven when I had to leave, but, there I was at last, on the street with my baby, and nowhere to go.

JOE

Oh!——

MARY

It was late afternoon when I left the hospital, and I hadn't a penny to my name. I thought of the McCarthys—

[JOE *lifts his head*]

but, well—I didn't go. I sat out on a park bench, that night——

JOE

Good God!——

MARY

It was October—a cold night. I was glad of the morning. But I was stunned; partly with cold—partly life stunned me. I kept sitting

there, warming my little one. People came —homeless folk—and sat beside me, but I heeded no one. I was thinking of ways to find work. Well, a man had left a newspaper on the bench. "Ads" I thought. There may be something there! There was; for a wet nurse. It was like sudden light in darkness! I tore the ad. out, and hurried. A kind policeman gave me ten cents when I told him where I wanted to go and that I had no money. I got there, weak and faint, but the mother engaged me. I told her about myself; but she was kind; oh, so kind! I lived there, nursing her baby girl and mine—for fifteen months. She was good to me and paid me well. She lived in a fine house, and a man of middle age came often to see her. I learned afterward that he was a rich man and that she was his mistress. I understood her big human sympathy then—perhaps his wife would have shown me the door. She was kinder than any one I'd met before—or since—except McCarthy.

[JOE *moves uneasily*]

I had plenty of free time, so I read a lot. got books from the library through her, and

I read the kind McCarthy started me on. . . . Joe, I learned to understand the worker's problems, and to see my own. I came to see that there was no chance for my baby,—legitimate or not—unless there were equal chances for all babies. Oh, that babe of mine! . . . Joe, before it came, I *hungered for you!*

JOE

[*Eagerly*]

Mary!

MARY

But after—all was turned into a deep, hungry love for her, that flowed out again like an ocean of love for all the lonely children of the world. . . . Sometimes I worked, sometimes I just looked for work, but always I managed to read—and to think and to go to meetings . . . mass meetings, where I learned things, too. Oh, I learned things! . . . I struggled —and suffered; but I knew it was not because I had my little one . . . in the way—I—did! —not because the law didn't approve of us, but because the world didn't have to give us work! Because I hadn't the right to earn a

living. Because the right to work which is the right to life was not mine—legally mine.

[*She pauses, deeply agitated*]

For a time I was a waitress. We had a strike, and I learned a lot there. Soon after, came the big strike—in which I was arrested.

JOE

The papers were full of your arrest. How could I have known it was you!

MARY

Every evening I went to those meetings. One night I got to my feet—and talked. I don't know how I did it, and the baby in my arms; I was carried away. My heart was bursting with pain. I couldn't sit silent. After that they *made* me talk—often. I—I had so much to say. Somehow it put new courage into the men—the police warned me to keep away. I couldn't; I *had* to speak. Then came my arrest.

JOE

Was it fer incitin' t' riot?

MARY

That was the reason they gave, but it wasn't that, of course.

JOE

I know the way they have of twistin' th' facts.

MARY

[*Rising and taking off her apron*]

A rumour had spread among the strikers that I—was—a—a *bad* woman; that my child—had no father. The rumour reached me; well, the workers didn't care . . . the workers are a fine lot, Joe; taking them all together, they're awfully human. They understand. But I thought of it all the way to the meeting that evening, and when I got up to speak I drew a picture of the way those women live whom rich men like their bosses keep, and another—of the workers' wives. I asked the workers if they didn't see how the difference in protection came about. The workers are forced to send their little ones to the mills, to the mines and factories—to grind out profits for the greedy few. How much protection have they in the law? How safe and secure are they?—How *legitimate* are they?—Doesn't the law cast them out? What chance do they stand as against even the *illegitimate* children of the rich?—It was for

saying things like this that they arrested me. It wasn't the children's right to *be* that I objected to—law or no law—but the right of the law to ignore millions of little ones and make slaves of them! When the mass roared its approval and someone in the crowd threatened to "get" the man who tried to slander me, they called it "inciting to riot" and I was placed under arrest. I went to jail for six months—with my baby.

[*She rises*]

Oh, my little one! It was kindness in them to let her come with me, for I should have died there without her.

[*She moves to stove with the bowl of potatoes and puts them into the pot*]

JOE

[*Much stirred, and rising*]

An' what will become o' her, Mary?

MARY

What becomes of most of the children of the poor! Until their wrongs are righted, my child can have no greater measure of protection, no happier life than they. I can help to right their wrongs, Joe.

JOE

[*Pacing the room*]

Fatherless! Ye should settle down an' give the child a home.

MARY

[*Going to cupboard and getting lamp*]

There's something much worse than being homeless in the sense you mean . . . besides, Joe, *I couldn't fit back into the old shell—I couldn't!*

JOE

[*Pausing*]

Ye—ye're not intendin' t' stay then at all?

MARY

I may make this a sort of headquarters if things go right. If they don't, I'll have to wander again.

JOE

[*Stopping near table and facing* MARY]

Folks'll call the child names, Mary, an' make it hard fer her—an' fer you.

MARY

[*Placing lighted lamp on table Left*]

Folks are not so narrow as they used to be, Joe.

Anyhow, I'm willing to take my chances with folks, for her sake—and mine.

[*She goes back to cupboard*]

JOE

[*Following her with his eyes*]

Her sake?

MARY

[*Finding a pan and something that she places into it*]

Yes.

JOE

How d'ye mean?

MARY

[*Stopping on the way to the stove with pan in hand*]

Joe, do you realize what it would be like for her if I were to marry you now?—If I'd put her in a home where there was no love?——

JOE

But there would be love, Mary!

MARY

—Yes, I know, but a half-love, a one-sided love is often worse than none. You'd *want me to care*, and if I'd be true to myself, there'd

be misery all the time, for both of us. How could the child be happy in such a home? And if I stopped being true to myself and became a hypocrite, she'd find it out, soon or late. Do you know what that can do to the soul of a child? Maybe you don't, Joe, but *I* do. And *knowing*, I'm willing to take my chances with the world, sooner than give her that kind of a "*home.*"

[*She goes to stove, opens the oven and puts in the pan*]

JOE

But ye won't deny that to grow up right every child needs a home, and the care of parents.

MARY

[*Shutting the oven door*]

She needs more. Self-respect and respect for her mother. When a girl has a big, live faith in her mother—

[*She takes up bowl and returns to table*]

she's never homeless though she hasn't a roof to cover her. But when she loses that faith—Joe, I'd rather she and I went begging.

[*She gathers the potato-peelings into the bowl*]

JOE

What notions!

MARY

I can't help it, Joe. I believe in them. Things being as they are, it's better for the child to grow up—like—this.

JOE

She'll never thank ye for it.

MARY

[*Coming close to* JOE]

She'll understand. That's more important. She loves and trusts me;—as—as once I loved and trusted you. No, no! I'm not accusing, only stating the fact. And when she *understands* me too—I'm not afraid for her! . . . The woman of tomorrow will approve what many people of today frown upon, *and my little girl is going to be one of those women of tomorrow.*

JOE

Mary!—She'd appreciate ye all the more, if she knew ye'd made some big sacrifice for her sake.

MARY

[*Looking straight into his eyes*]

Would she, if for her sake I became a street woman?

JOE

[*Shocked*]

What an idea!

MARY

Feeling as I do, this would be no different. *And the woman of tomorrow will see it in the same light.*

JOE

[*With a burst and in desperation*]

Little girl! ye cared s' much once, it don't seem possible ye couldn't care again!

MARY

[*Looking kindly and sorrowfully at him*]

If I could, it would be easier for her and easier for me. I *wish I could*, but——

JOE

[*Attempting to embrace her*]

P'raps, Mary——

MARY

[*Falling away as in loathing*]

Oh-o-o-oh!

[*She shudders and attempts to throw off an imaginary sliminess. Collecting herself*]

You—you see, Joe, how dreadful it would be. I couldn't—couldn't!

JOE

[*Who has taken the rebuff with astonishment and horror*]

Ye said—ye wished!——

MARY

[*With a rueful smile*]

That wish may be a compliment to your character, Joe—for you're not a bad sort. But wishing isn't loving, and doesn't help love to come back, once it's gone.

JOE

[*Suddenly bending desperately close to her*]

I'll make ye love me, Mary, I'll make ye!

MARY

[*Drawing away*]

Feeling as I do now, you see, Joe, I couldn't even let you try.

JOE

Yer feelin's may change.

MARY

I—don't think so.

JOE

But *if* they should?——

MARY

If!——

JOE

[*Hopefully*]

Then ye'll let me try?

MARY

[*As* THE CHILD *cries*]

No, no, Joe. It's an impossible "If!"

[*She turns and hurries to the alcove*]

JOE

Impossible! . . .

[*Pausing and looking toward the alcove in agitation*]

Our youngster!

MARY

[*From alcove*]

Yes, sweetheart, here's mother!

JOE

[*Sitting on sofa and bending in a listening attitude*]

Sweetheart!

JOEY'S VOICE

Is grandfather here yet?

MARY

[*From alcove*]

No, Joey, not yet.

JOE

Joey!

[*He buries his face in his hands*]

MARY

[*Coming from the alcove softly, leading* THE CHILD *by the hand and speaking in low tones*]

Now, Joey, dear, go kiss your daddy.

[THE CHILD *goes shyly and hesitatingly over to* JOE *and gently touches his knee.* JOE *raises his head and, with a low cry, folds* THE CHILD *in his arms.* MARY *standing near her old work-table by the*

window with her back to the scene, is noticeably agitated]

THE CHILD

[*Shyly*]

You are my daddy!

JOE

[*Struggling with his emotion*]

An'—an'—you're "Mother Mary's" little girl?

THE CHILD

All poor little girls are!

MARY

[*To herself*]

My darling!

[THE CHILD *shyly kisses* JOE *on the cheek and* JOE *responds passionately as* JENNIE *opens the door allowing* JOHN *who follows her, to pass in first*]

JOHN

[*Pleased at the sight of father and child*]

Well, well! . . .

[JOE *has risen,* THE CHILD *clinging to him.* JOHN *approaches them*]

JENNIE

[*Throwing her shawl off, and going to* MARY]

Mary! I'm *so* glad ye're home again!

MARY

I'm glad to be here, Jenn! . . .

JOHN

[*To* JOE]

A fine youngster, eh?

JOE

Yes, if she'd only stay!

JOHN

Ye mean she said—no?

[JOE *indicates the affirmative by bending his head low.* JOHN *looks astonished.* JENNIE *is coming toward* JOE *and* THE CHILD, *and* JOHN *goes directly to* MARY]

JENNIE

[*To* THE CHILD]

What's your name, sweetheart?

THE CHILD

Joey Lacey

JENNIE

Joey!

[*She looks at* JOE *with a significant smile.* JOE *looks at the floor*]

Well, Joey, won't ye kiss yer Aunt Jennie?

[THE CHILD *kisses her. She talks in low tones to* JOE *as the three move to the sofa*]

JOHN

Is it true, daughter?—Tell me. Ye're not goin' t' stay?—ye're not goin' t' take him?

MARY

[*In suppressed tones pleading passionately*]

Daddy, there's something here won't let me, just as there was something here that forced me out into the world alone—with my baby coming. I can't say yes, when this—

[*Beating her heart*]

says no! I'd rather leave here tonight. . . . Don't drive me away again, Father, don't.

JOHN

[*Respectfully*]

He—he cares fer ye now, daughter.

MARY

Yes, but now I don't care for him. . . . I wish I could, but I can't. If ever the miracle should be—but it's easier to raise up men from the dead than bring back love that has died. If you're afraid of what folks will say, I'll go. I've struggled and suffered. Now I can earn my own bread. I'll ask you for nothing, Daddy, but I must belong to myself—be mistress of my own body and soul. I couldn't marry the man who didn't love me even though I loved him and his child lay under my heart. I can't marry the man I don't love even though he loves me and is the father of my child.

JOHN

[Placing his hands on her shoulders]

Don't worry, "Mother Mary." Ye jes' do as ye feel it's right t' do. I ain't goin' t' try t' hinder ye, this time.

MARY

[A sob catching her]

Dear Daddy!

[She kisses him, moves to cupboard, and busies herself with the dishes]

JOHN

[*Coming toward the group near sofa*]

Well, Jennie—a nice little one, eh?——

JENNIE

[*As she moves toward cupboard*]

Yes, Father——

JOHN

Eh?——

[*Tapping* THE CHILD *playfully with a crutch*]

JOE

[*Taking up his cap*]

I—I guess I'd better go. It's—near supper time, an' they don't wait at th' boardin' house.

JENNIE

Ye better stay, Joe, an' have supper with us.

JOHN

Yes, Joe; come on; it's a long way t' yer boardin' house—an' it's gettin' kind o' late.

JOE

[*Hesitantly fingering his cap*]

I—p'raps I'd better run along.

MARY

[*Not significantly, but kindly*]

You'd better stay, Joe. Joey, ask your daddy to stay for supper.

THE CHILD

[*Going to him*]

Oh, will you, Daddy?

JOE

[*Throwing his cap on the couch*]

Yes, Joey, I sure will if you want me!

JENNIE

Get chairs, folks.

[*They go for them*]

Here's one fer Henry, an' one fer Father——

JOHN

Thank ye, child.

[*To* MARY *who stands musing at the head of the table fingering the knives and forks*]

It's all right, little girl. I understand.

THE CHILD

[*Trying to bring a chair for herself*]

Oh, Daddy!

[JOE *drops his and hurries to her*]

MARY

[*Placing her hands on* JOHN'S *shoulders and turning a grateful look upon him*]

Dear Daddy!

[JOHN *lifts her face in the palms of his two hands and kisses her*]

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